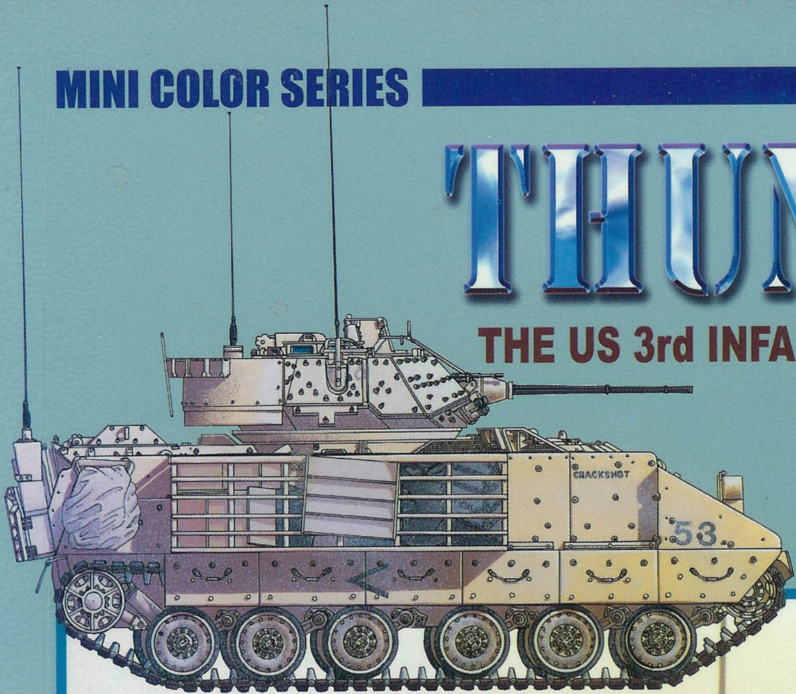
MINI COLOR SERIES 7514

THUNDER RUN

THE US 3rd INFANTRY DIVISION'S DRIVE TO BAGHDAD

Robert W. Burik & Eric R. Olson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THE US 3rd INFANTRY DIVISION'S DRIVE TO BAGHDAD

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Illustrations by Hubert Cance

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INTRODUCTION

7 April, 2003. Red Two was down, knocked out by a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) that had penetrated a fuel cell. The other armored vehicles of Task Force 1-64 of the 3rd Infantry Division (3rd ID) went around the disabled Abrams and continued their thunder run attack into downtown Baghdad. The sound of small arms fire crackled from every direction. More RPGs flew across the Americans' path on Highway 8, and some found their targets. White One identified a BMP down a narrow road but the hydraulics of the turret failed, so he passed the target to White Four. White Four's loader announced, "Up" and the tank commander ordered the driver to slow down so a clean shot could be made. The gunner of White Four quickly identified the BMP and destroyed it with a blast from the main gun. The whir of the turbine engines continued as White Four and the rest of the 2nd Brigade fought into Baghdad and past the famous parade ground of the Iraqi military marked by the large crossed sabers. The fighting continued as the 2nd Brigade pushed on to secure the bridges and palaces in the city center. American infantrymen (dismounts) secured rooftops of key buildings to help consolidate the gains of this second thunder run attack of the past three days. But the enemy did not give up so easily, and RPGs and mortar shells continued flying through the air, reaching out for targets. But, slowly, the Americans subdued the enemy and Baghdad itself was finally secured. This was the first invading army to take Baghdad since the Mongols in 1258 AD.

The second thunder run attack that helped capture Baghdad was only one part, albeit a significant one, of the battle to topple Saddam Hussein and his regime. The 3rd ID, known as the "Rock of The Marne," had much to tackle on the march up to Baghdad. The distance and speed in which this all happened were historic, and this speed in part explains why so many have the impression it was an easy victory for the coalition.

This book will focus on the combat history of the 3rd ID from the crossing of the Kuwait-Iraq border through to the fall of Baghdad. At the time of writing, a number of areas in Iraq are still in dispute due to insurgents who do not wish democracy to be brought to the region. But the fact remains that a horrible regime, which supported terrorism and threatened neighboring countries, was removed in a lightning quick fashion without requiring the expected siege of Baghdad. The 3rd ID was a large part of the reason for such a quick and decisive victory.

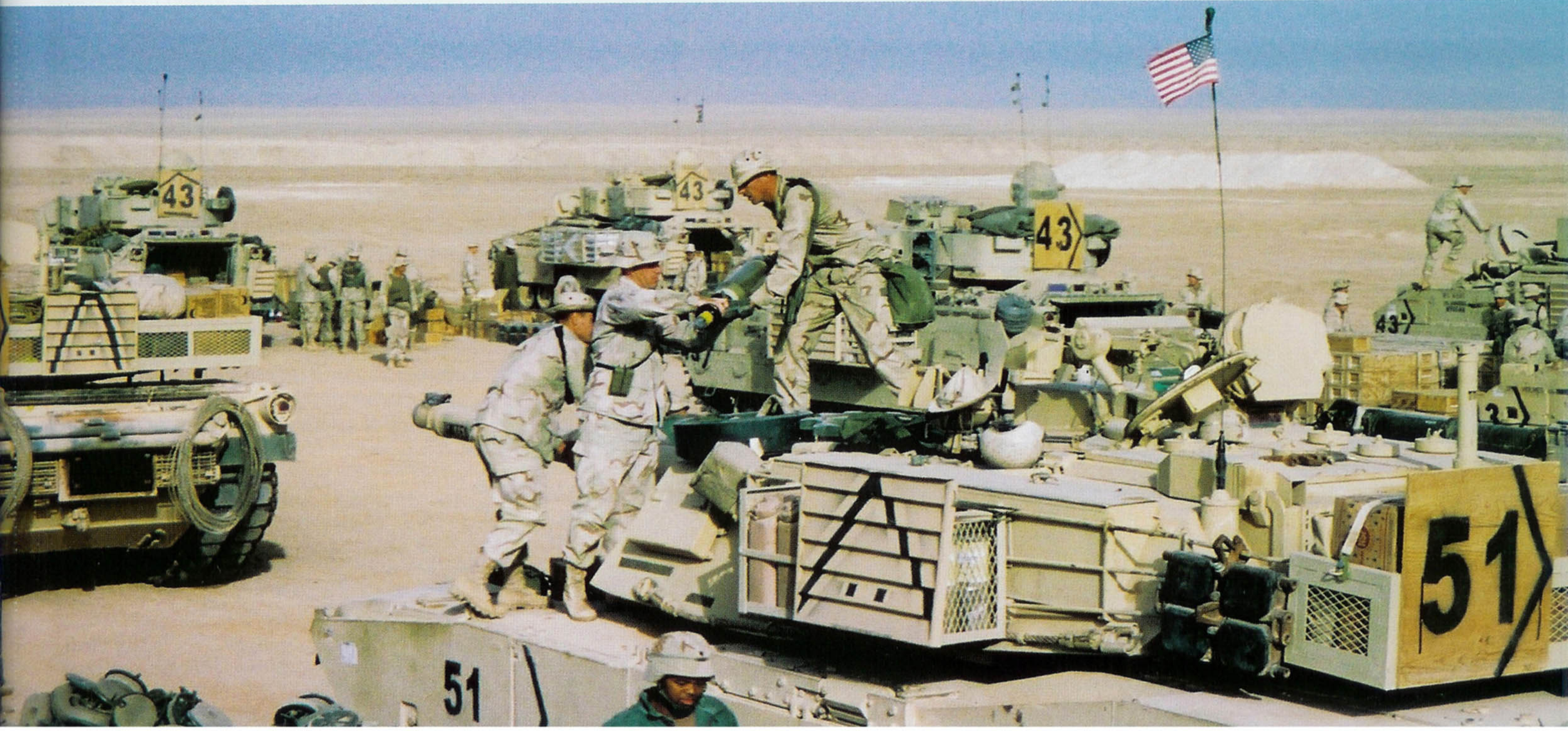
Robert W. Burik, January 2005

E58) SFC Olson in his desert camouflage MOPP suit. The charcoal lining is also evident here. In addition he wears a colored neckerchief in an attempt to keep the dust out. Close by is an M4A1carbine that most TCs kept handy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Steven Zaloga, Don Busack, Prime Portal, Major Gino Quintiliani, US Army, Lawrence Goh, George E. Bush
My wife, Sherry Burik, for her support and technical help.
All photographs are from US Army sources except where otherwise noted.

This book is dedicated to the memory of SSG Stevon A. Booker.

OPENING PHASES



An Alpha Company tank uploads sabot main gun rounds at Camp New York in Kuwait. The tactical markings are still freshly applied. The plywood battleboard was secured to the extended bustle rack with zip cuffs slipped through small holes in the plywood. Each tank in 1-64 Armor and 4-64 Armor also received two locally made jerry can racks in addition to the extended bustle rack. Here, this crew has placed both jerry can racks on the left side of the turret.

In the early hours of 21 March, 2003 the division crossed the Kuwait-Iraq border with the 1st Brigade in the lead. Intelligence reported there was no enemy in the area, so the division traveled with its lights on.

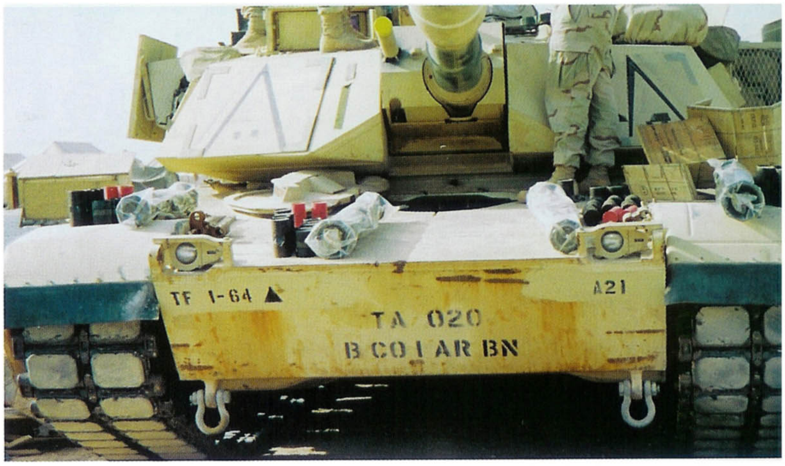
By 25 March the 1st Brigade had reached the town of Kifl, which possessed a key bridge across the Euphrates. As it literally rained mud, 3-69 Armor (3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment) attempted to seize the bridge while the Iraqis tried to blow it. Before the enemy could blow the bridge, three M1A1s from Alpha Company, 1st Platoon, crossed it and were then temporarily isolated after the bridge was blown. Meanwhile the division used the storm to bring in additional troops under cover and after several days of fighting the town was secured with the help of the 101st Airborne.

Also, near Najaf on the night of 25/26 March, 3-7 Cavalry, the famous Custer Regiment, made heavy enemy contact with two M1A1s, a Bradley, and an Ace engineering dozer vehicle knocked out at an intersection. This was in part due to friendly fire. One of the Abrams had its ammunition locker penetrated by an RPG, but the blast doors worked as designed, and the crew was uninjured.

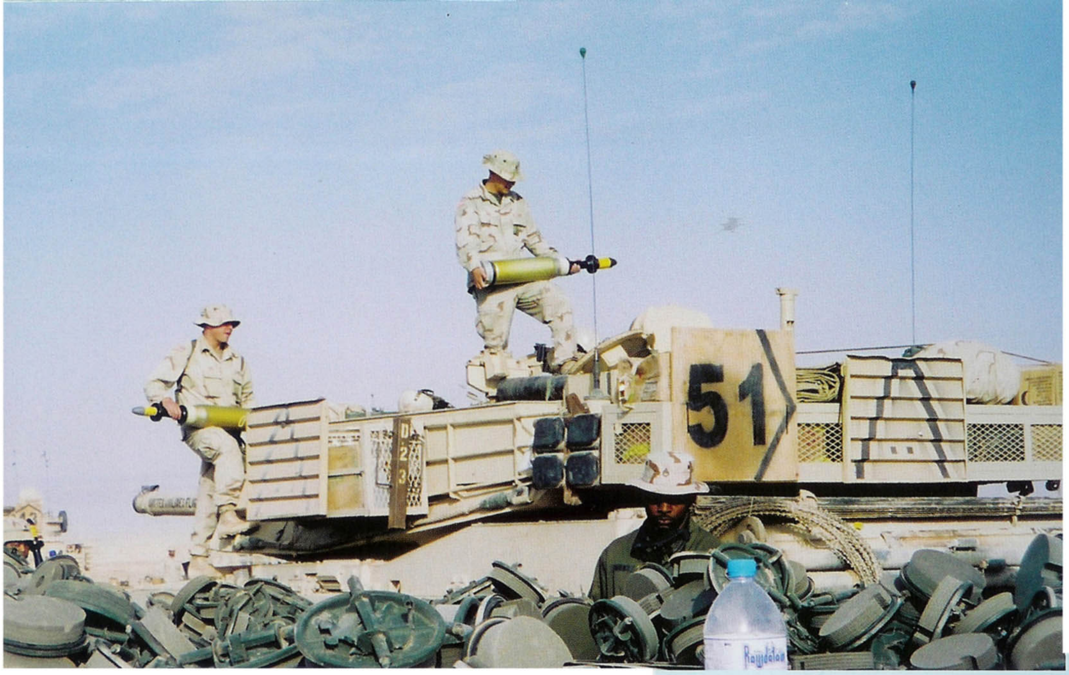
Throughout the fighting, the 3rd ID encountered Fedayeen dressed in their black pajama-style outfits, paramilitaries dressed in civilian clothes, regular Iraqi army personnel dressed in civilian clothes, as well as traditionally uniformed Iraqi army personnel. Coordination between these groups was practically non-existent, but contact at times was still intense. It is a testament to the professionalism of the 3rd ID that civilian casualties were kept to a minimum considering the ways in which the enemy fought, and that civilians themselves roamed the battlefield seemingly oblivious to the fighting going on around them.

OLSON
U.S. ARMY

SFC Olson holds a 120mm sabot round (fin stabilized, armor piercing discarding sabot). The round comes packed with a protective cone so the sharp tip does not get damaged. The radioactive warning label is peeling off in this example. The round weighs 45 lbs.

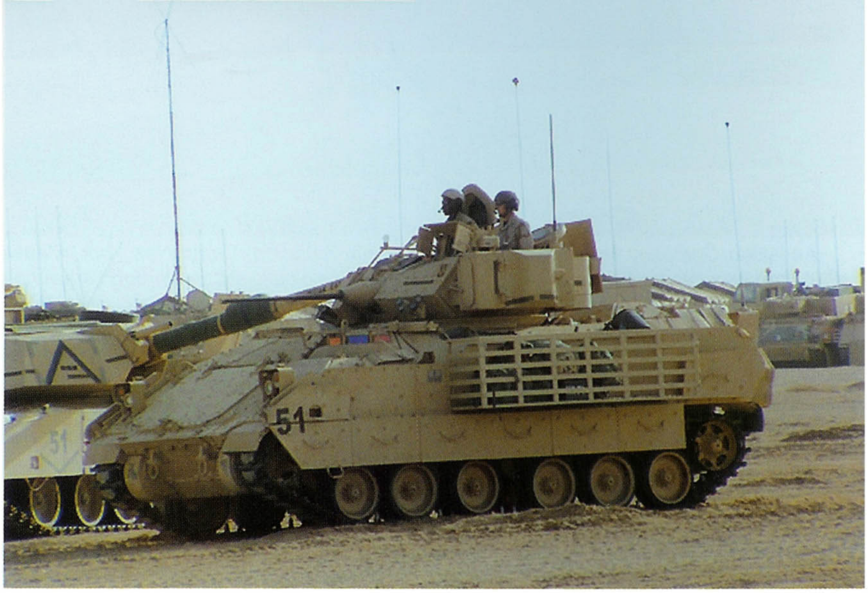


This is the platoon leader's vehicle as evidenced by the bumper code 'A21.' The A stands for Alpha Co, the 2 is for 2nd Platoon, and the 1 is for the first vehicle of a four vehicle platoon. This particular vehicle was originally from a different unit as can be seen by the fresh paint of the bumper codes.

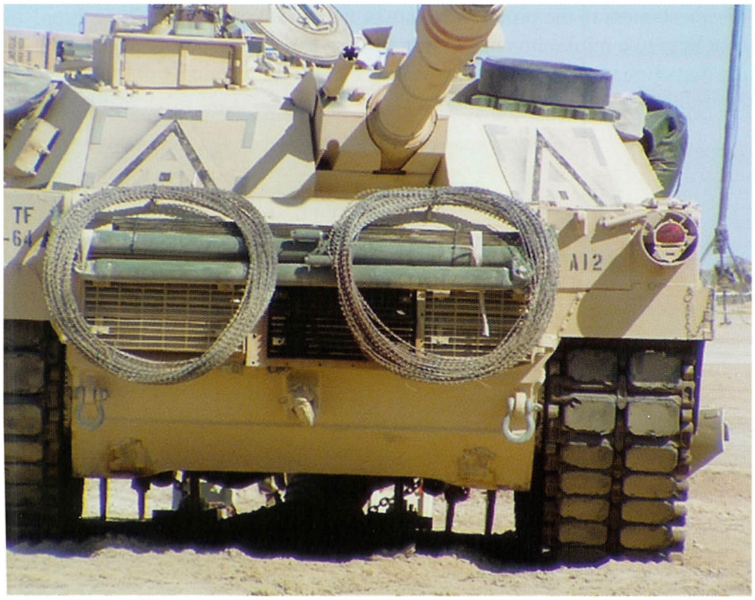


The battleboard repeated the large air identification number that was on the side skirts of the tank. Each battalion was assigned a number (1 – 9) and the second part of the number stood for the company. Thus, 51 stood for 1-64 Armor Battalion, Alpha Company. The direction of the chevron on the battleboard stood for the platoon. Pointing up denoted 1st Platoon, right-facing was 2nd Platoon, and so forth around the clock face. The CIPs (Combat Identification Panels) had a different system. The chevron stood for the company. Up was Alpha Co, down-facing was Bravo Co, left facing was Charlie Co, and right facing was Delta Co. The "dots", which actually were small squares, stood for the platoon. So, in the case of this tank, the CIP indicates this is a vehicle from Alpha Co, 2nd Platoon.

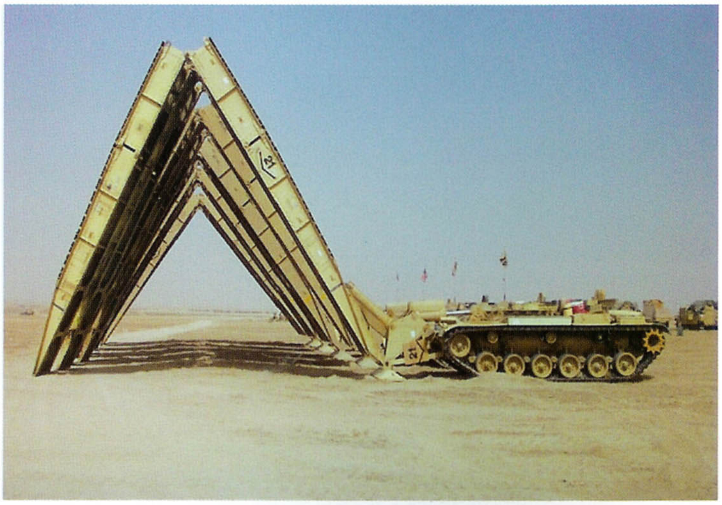
The gunner in SFC Olson's tank prepares his station for operation. US gunners had a decisive range advantage over Iraqi tanks out in the open, which is one reason why few battles took place in the desert areas. The Iraqis felt they could inflict more casualties on the Americans by drawing them into city fighting. But ultimately, the Iraqi strategy was to bog down the US in street fighting around Baghdad, and to then force a ceasefire.



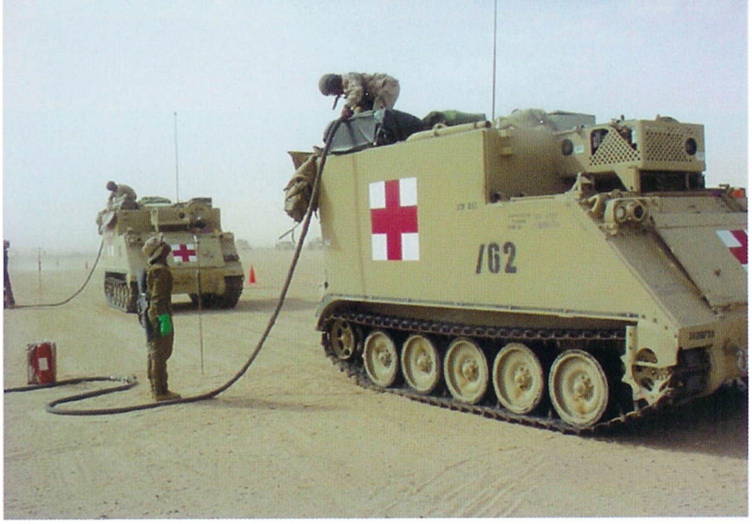
An M2A2 Bradley ready to cross the border. The Bradley was originally designed with a flotation screen that allowed it to cross rivers. It was not considered a complete success, and so as the design progressed and weight was added, the flotation screen was deleted. As can be seen here, Bradleys had locally made racks attached to their sides.



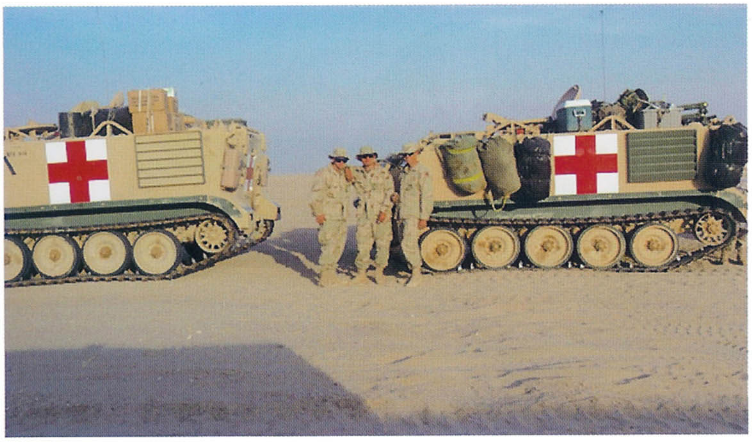
Two tanks in each platoon carried tow bars – usually the wing men, which were tanks 2 and 3. All tanks carried two coils of razor wire for security purposes. This 1st Platoon tank also has a mine plow attached to the front hull.



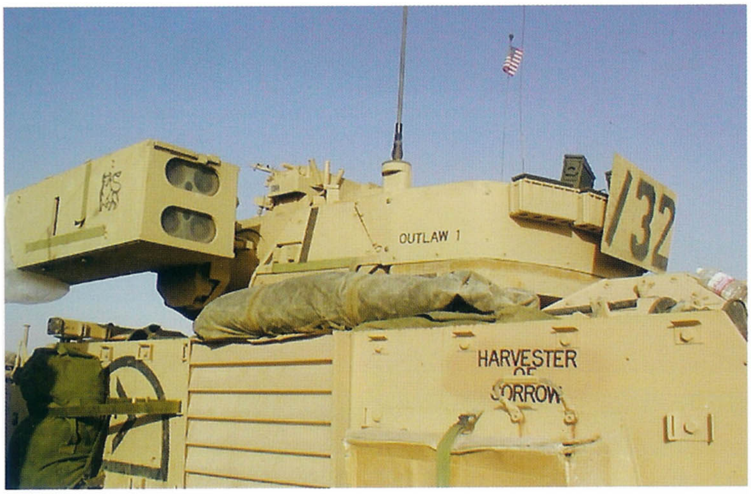
AVLBs show off their usefulness just prior to crossing the border. The Iraqis did not defend the border, so the engineer units were only needed to breach holes in the berms at the border. The Iraqis instead placed observation posts along the border.



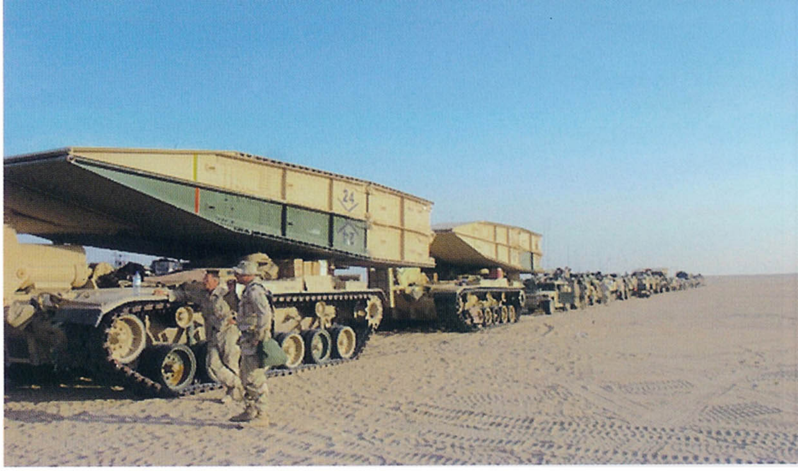
Ambulance tracks top up their fuel tanks prior to crossing the border. The US Army has three options when it comes to refueling. One is a ROM (Refuel On the Move) which is a service style gas station. Another is a Tailgate re-supply where the fuelers come to the parked vehicles one at a time. In the third option, known as a Service Station, tanks in a laager pull out of position one at a time to refuel while a HEMTT usually stands by with ammunition as well.



The M113 remains an integral part of the US Army. Here are two ambulances being made ready for the border crossing. The hull behind the running gear of these two tracks was left in its original green color. This would hardly be evident after combat operations started and the vehicles took on a more weathered look.

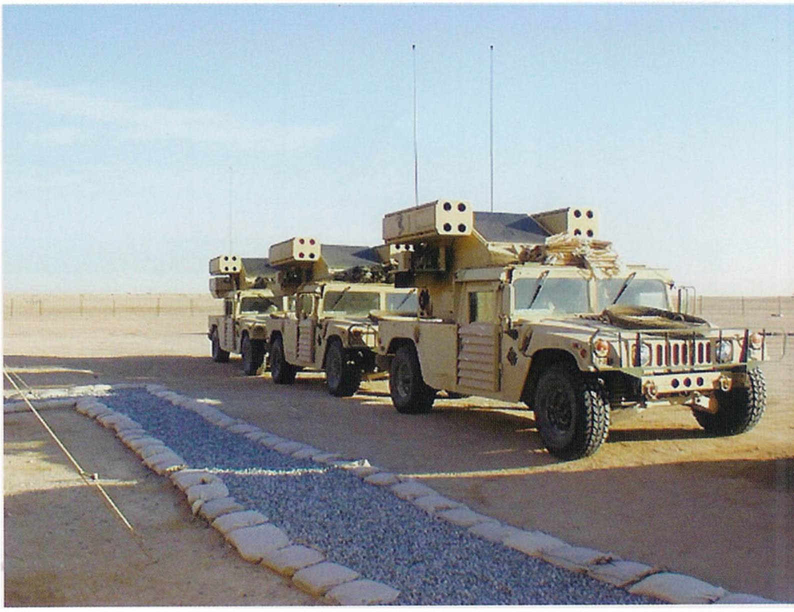


The 3rd ID was equipped with a newer ADA (Air Defense Artillery) vehicle based on the Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, otherwise known as Linebacker. Instead of the TOW launcher, the Linebacker sports an Avenger air defense system that is made up of Stinger missiles. The M6 Linebacker is designed to provide short range air defense day or night. At Kifl, 3-25 ADA responded to a call to seize a key bridge. Forces were spread out, so the captain of the ADA battery got the call to lead the attack onto the bridge. Ultimately, heavier forces were needed, but the flexibility of the Linebacker was proven that day.

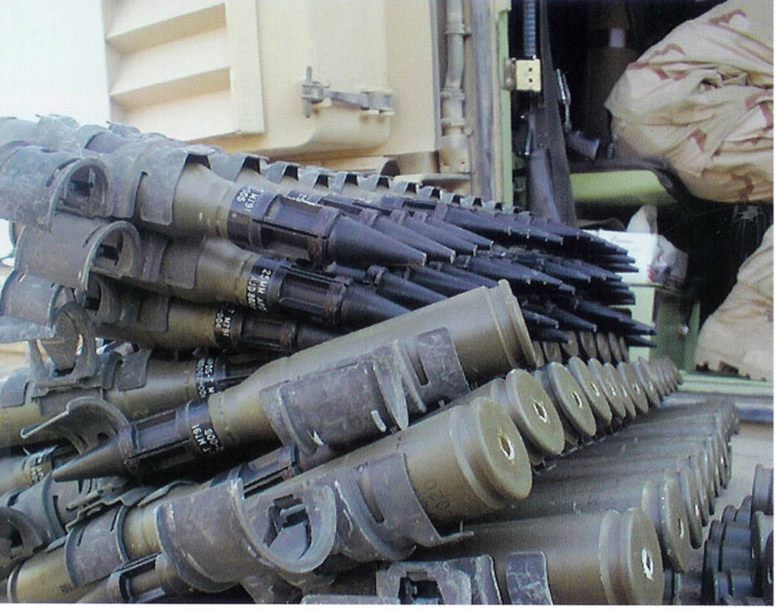


These engineers check their equipment prior to crossing the border. The US Army still relies on the M60 chassis for its AVLBs (Armored Vehicle Launch Bridge). It requires a crew of two. When extended the scissors-type bridge is capable of supporting 60 ton class vehicles, and up to 70 tons when folded.

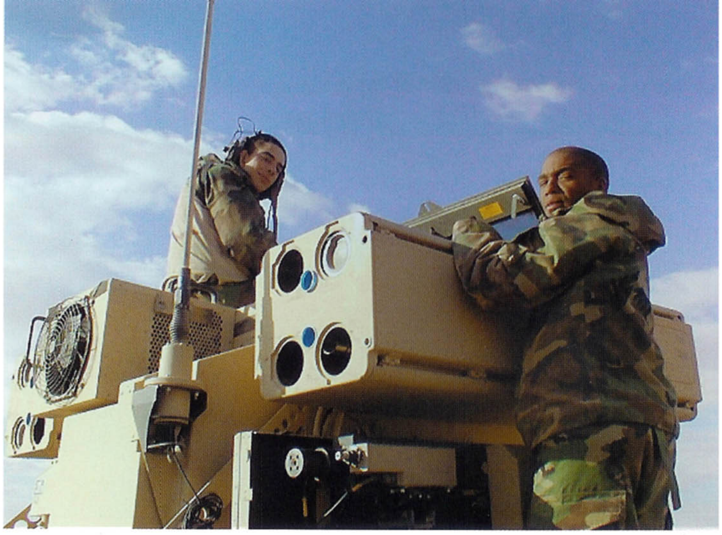
Bridge-laying was expected to be a major factor in the campaign. Although the combat engineers were needed in numerous situations, for the most part the obstacles put up by the enemy were not as difficult as expected. This was in large part due to the lightning quick advance of the 3rd ID and the lack of coordination between units in the Iraqi defense.



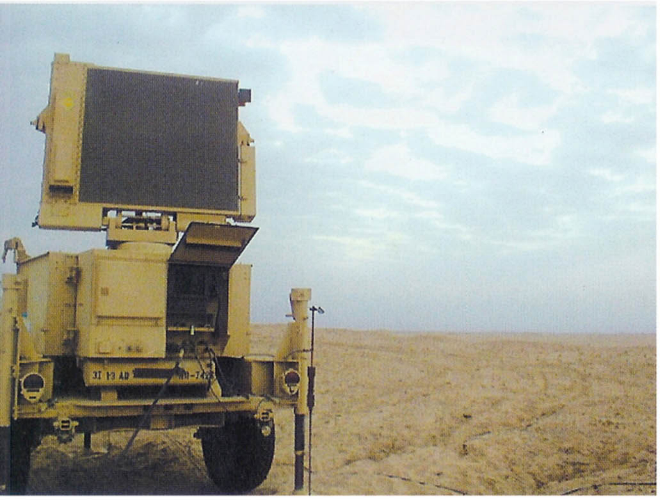
The Avenger mounted on HMMWVs. It has a two man crew with the gunner in a turret mounted between the two missile pods. As it turned out, the ADA units would not be needed in their traditional roles since the Iraqi Air Force did not put one plane into the air.



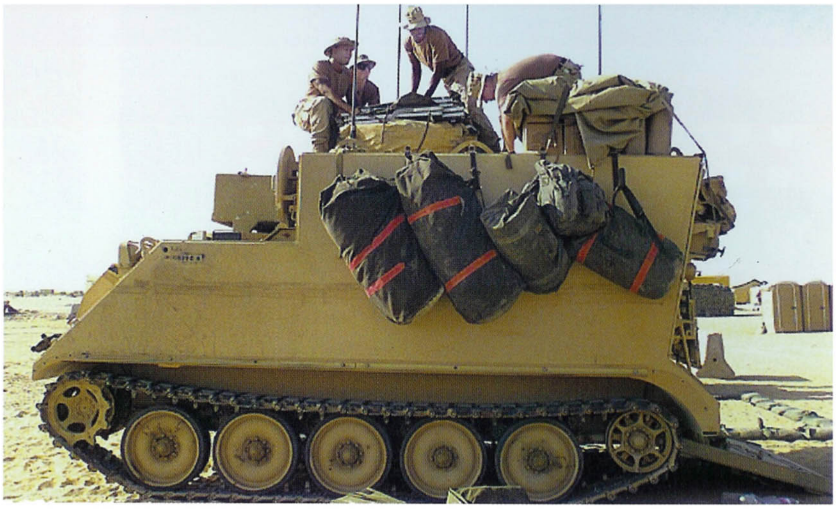
The Bradley is armed with a 25mm M242 Bushmaster chain gun. The single barrel is capable of firing two kinds of ammunition due to its dual feed system which is operated remotely. It can fire HE (High Explosive) or AP (Armor Piercing). Here belts of 25mm ammo wait to be loaded into a Bradley.



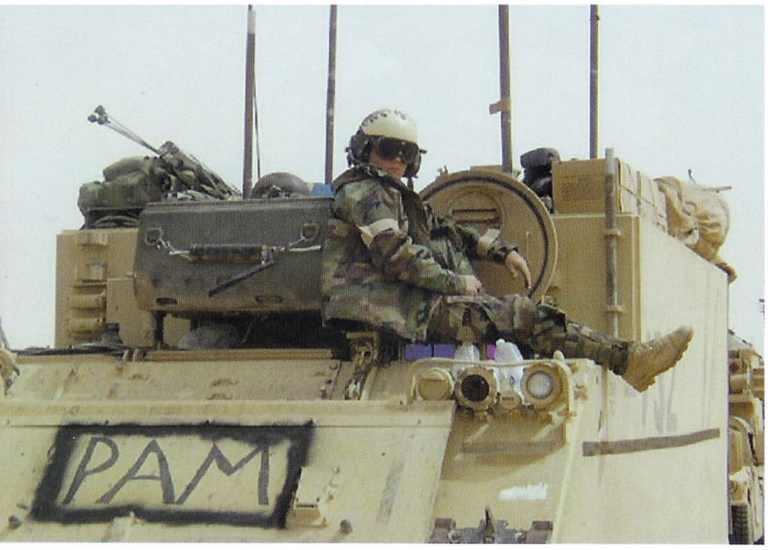
Dressed in their MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) suits, these men prepare their Avenger for the border crossing. The number one concern of the troops going into the war was the possible use of chemical weapons by the Iraqis. They had used them against Iran and they used them again against the Kurds. It was felt that Saddam Hussein would have no issue with using them against an invading army like the Coalition, and then blaming their use on the Coalition.



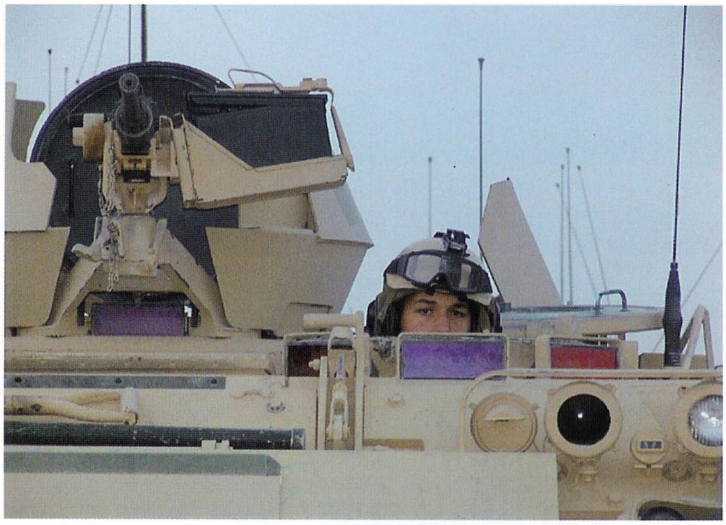
This trailer-mounted piece of equipment is an AN/MPQ-64 Sentinel Air Defense Radar. It is used to track incoming air threats and direct ADA units to engage those threats. It offers an effective range of 40km.



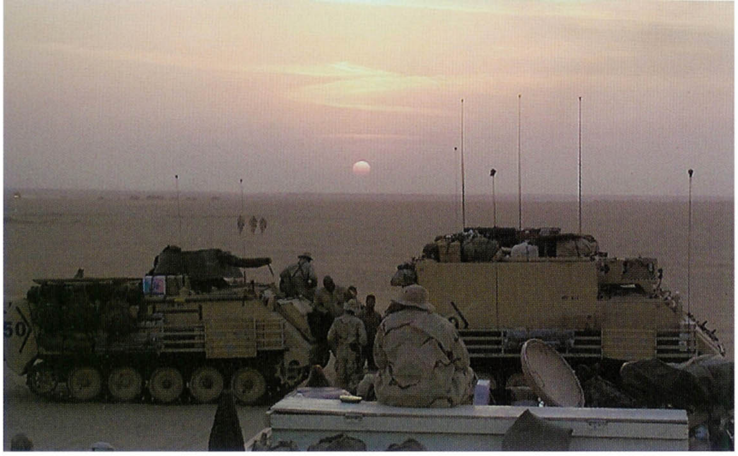
This M577 does not have a side stowage rack attached, unlike most vehicles in the M113 family during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The US Army still considers the M577 and the rest of the M113 family to be very useful, despite the design's age. As well, many armies around the world continue to use the basic design.



This is an M1068A3, which is an upgraded version of the M577. It can be identified by its slightly different looking auxiliary power unit. About two thirds of the older M577s in the US inventory have been slated for conversion.

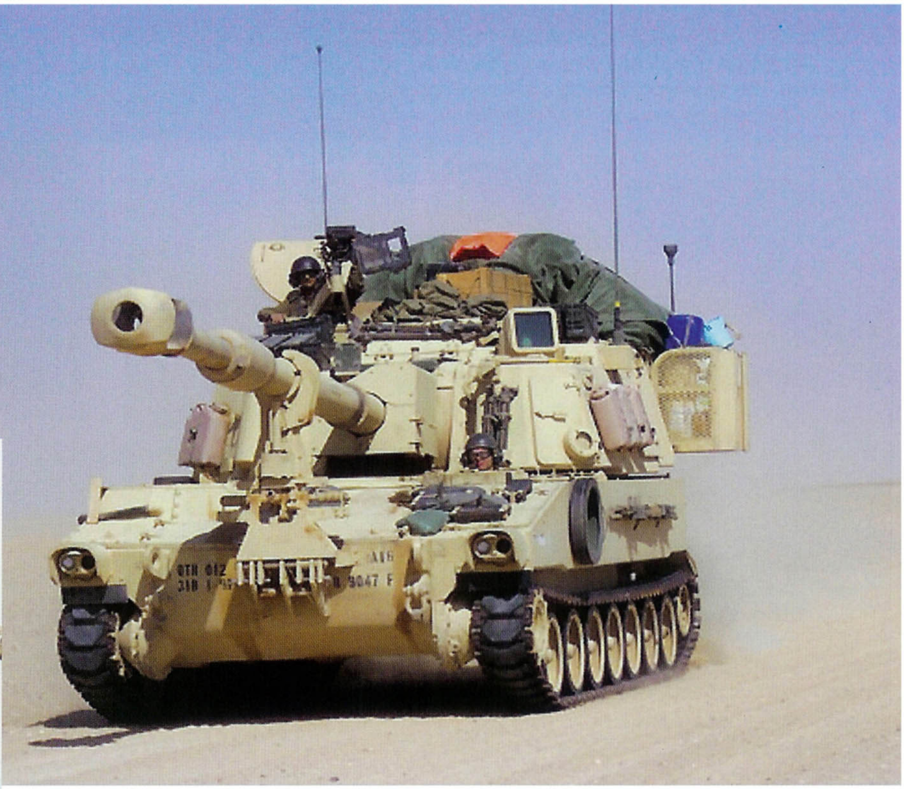


A close-up of the driver in his hatch of an M113. This M113 has an ACAV kit to provide additional protection for the track commander. The driver's CVC helmet has a mount for the night vision goggles (NVG).

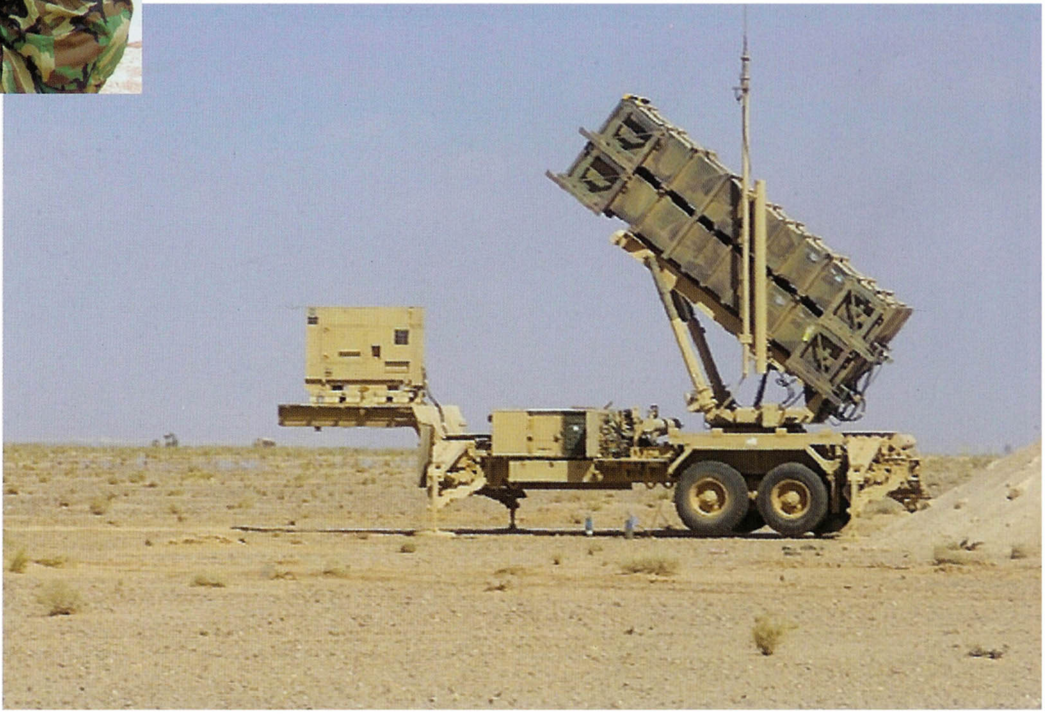


Like other replacement parts, many of the ACAV kits remained in their original green color. The track in the foreground has a large locker attached to its roof. Still, many M113s had to go without an ACAV kit to protect the TC as there were not enough to go around.

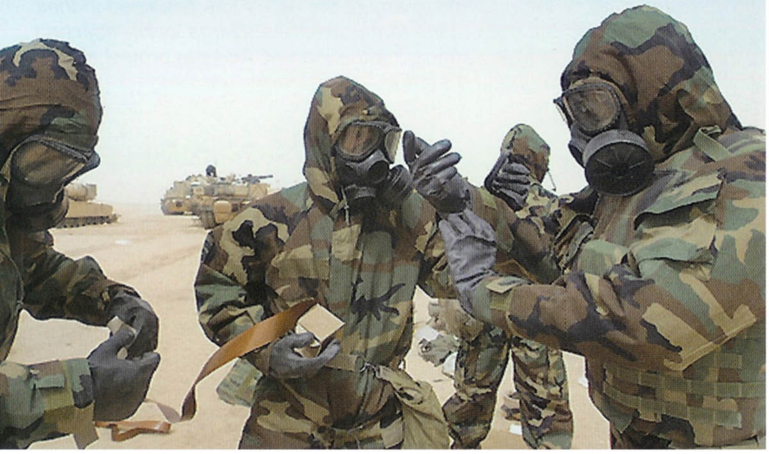
A Paladin rumbles to the border, festooned with all manner of gear. It has a crew of 4 men and is the most advanced cannon in the US Army arsenal. No external assistance is needed to complete a fire mission. It can fire its first round within 60 seconds, giving it a "shoot and scoot" capability which increases its chance of survival against counter-battery fire. Top speed is 35mph.



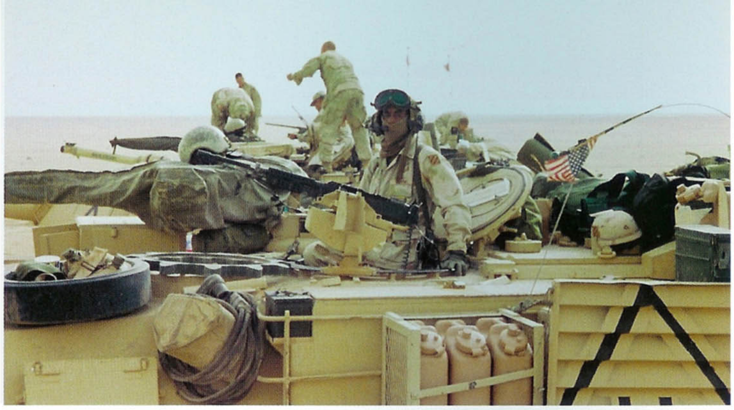
Early warning systems were able to provide US forces with a 15 – 20 minute warning of Scud attacks. This gave soldiers plenty of time to don their gear. But, as the Army moved into Iraq this sort of lead time could not be expected. This was because chemical shells fired by front line artillery were expected to be used, as well as long range Scud missiles.



A Patriot missile air defense system. The system has gone through upgrades since the First Gulf War in 1991. A number of Iraqi missiles were successfully intercepted early in the war, on their way to targets in Kuwait and the massed troops on the border. However, a British Tornado with a crew of two was mistakenly shot down by a Patriot in the opening days of the war.

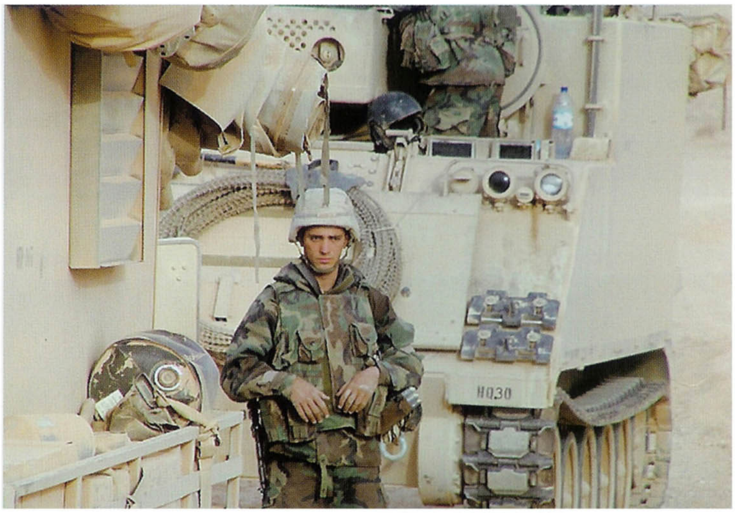


After getting their MOPP suits on, soldiers place M9 tape around arms and legs. The tape would change color if a chemical agent was detected. M9 tape could also be seen all over vehicles as well, such as on antennas and gun barrels.



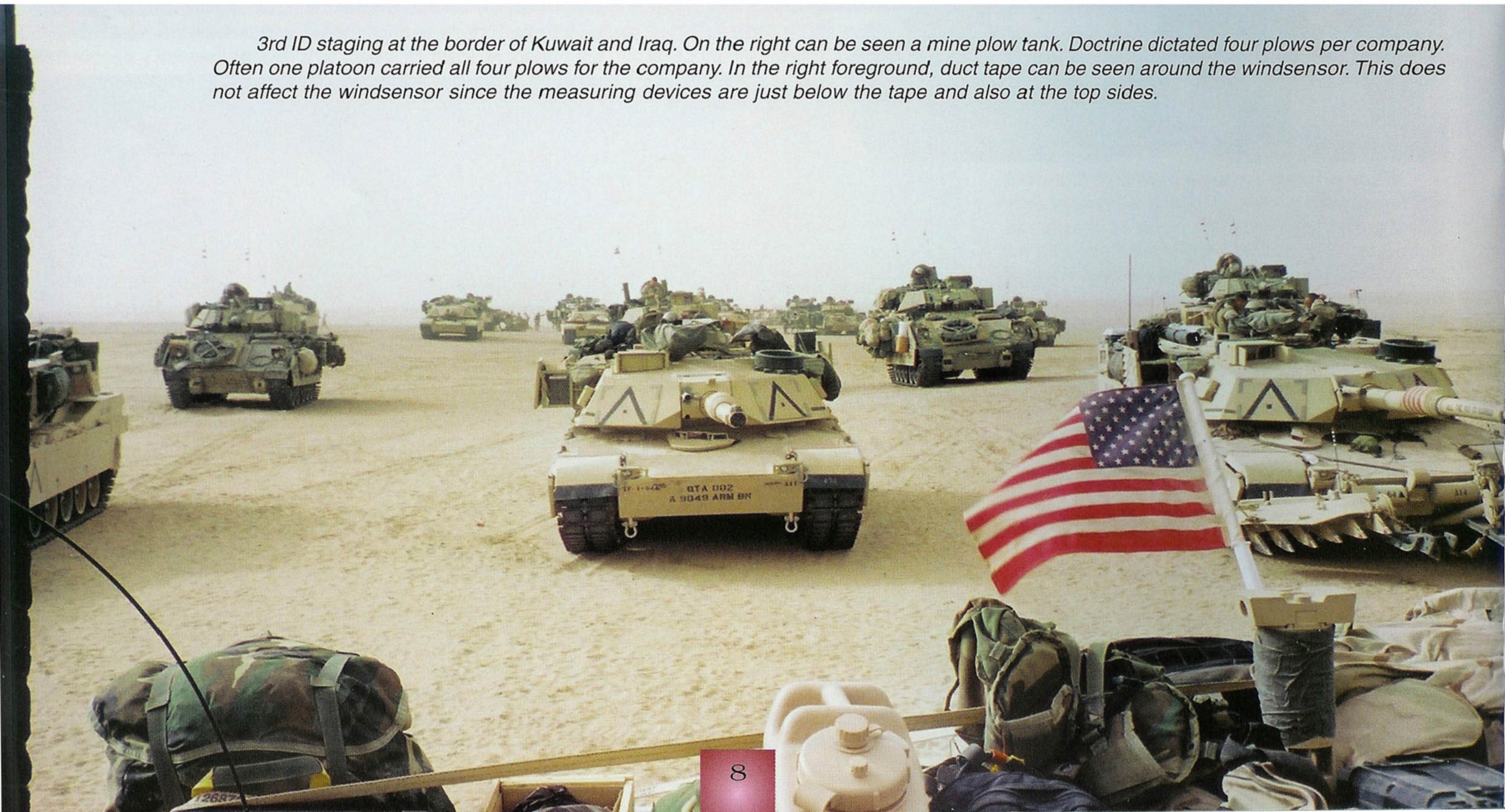
This crew has wrapped the battery cables around the smoke discharger. Also, the loader has attached part of the dismount kit to his M240 machine gun. The barrel has a hand guard attached so the gunner can hold it without being burned while firing in a dismounted mode.

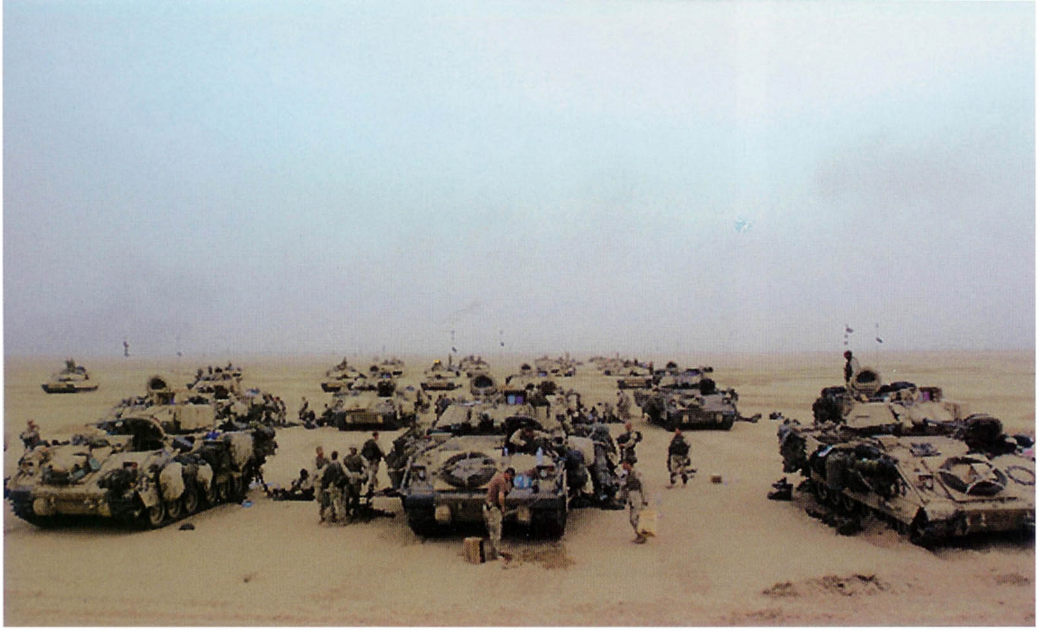
This tank commander (TC) is ready to cross the border, with binoculars at the ready, maps in front of him, and the .50-cal loaded. The Coalition was most concerned about a chemical attack during the early stages of the war, such as when units were massed at the border, and later when they got near Baghdad.



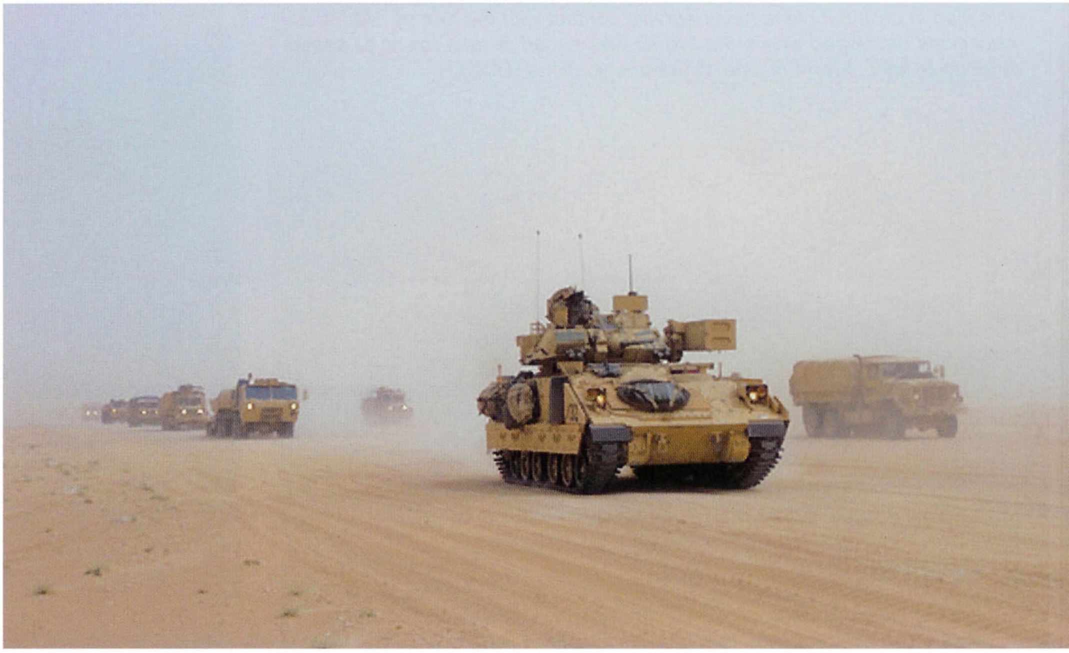
A crewman awaits the order to cross the border as he stands next to his M577. He wears his Interceptor Body Armor (IBA) over the top of his MOPP suit. The front vehicle shows the locally made storage racks that were also on Bradleys, but the rear vehicle does not have them.

3rd ID staging at the border of Kuwait and Iraq. On the right can be seen a mine plow tank. Doctrine dictated four plows per company. Often one platoon carried all four plows for the company. In the right foreground, duct tape can be seen around the windsensor. This does not affect the windsensor since the measuring devices are just below the tape and also at the top sides.

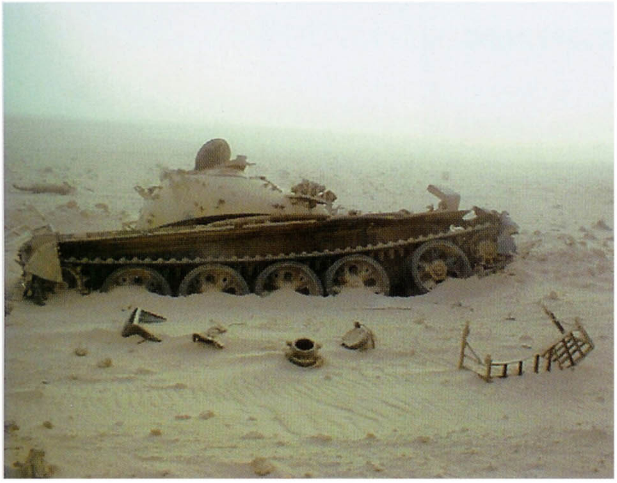




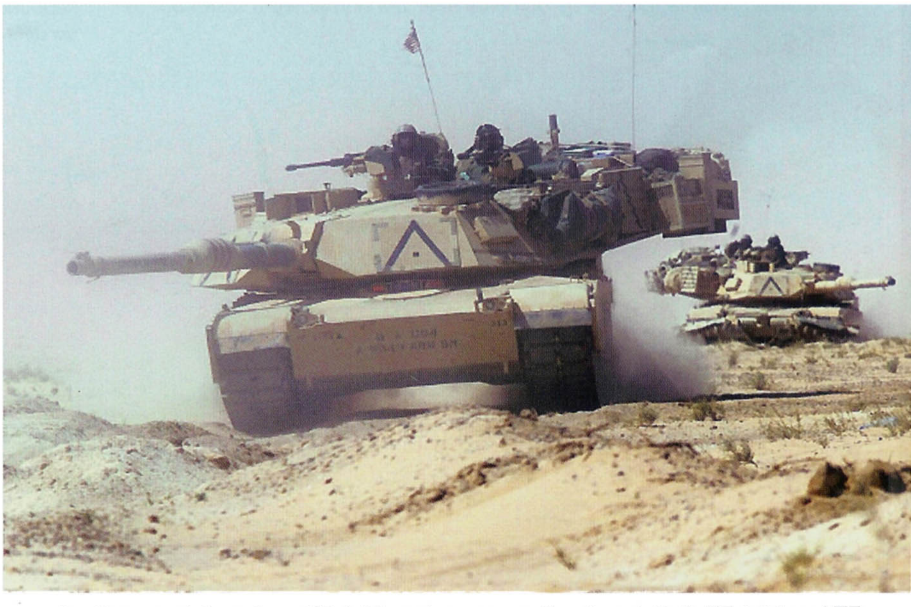
Bradleys staging at the border. Most tank companies had two platoons of M1A1 tanks and one platoon of Bradleys. The Bradley was originally designed to provide protection against 14.5mm projectiles. The M2A2 protects against 30mm projectiles on all sides and has spall liners on the inside of the vehicle as well.



3rd ID moves to the border with headlights on in a dust storm. Lights were used since intelligence determined there were no threats in the area, and traffic safety was a more important concern.

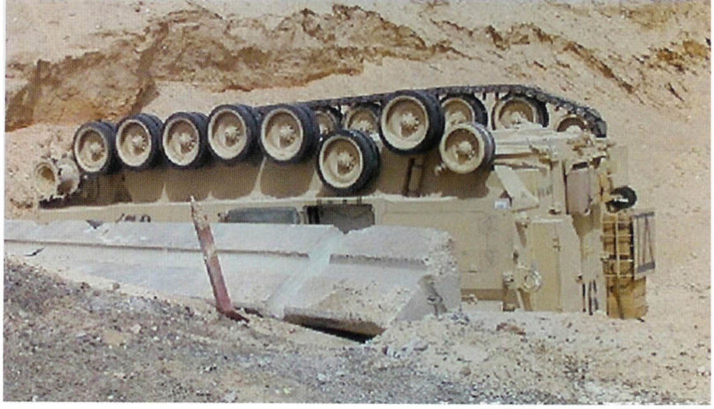


During the first night, with the 1st Brigade in the lead, Task Force (TF) 2-7 Infantry came upon a graveyard of Iraqi tanks from the First Gulf War. In their thermal imagers the nervous tankers thought they had come upon a previously undetected enemy tank unit. Some of these tankers shot up the long dead tanks.

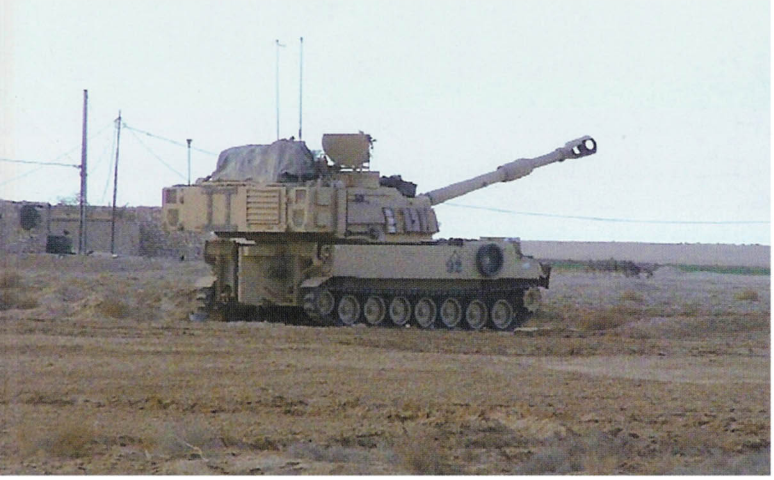


An Abrams platoon from TF 4-64 pushes across the desert. Both TF 1-64 and TF 4-64 tanks were provided with extended bustle racks and jerry can racks. Here, the lead tank's extended bustle rack is just evident, giving the turret a much larger appearance.

More tanks kick up the dust in the southern desert of Iraq. While on the move each tank was assigned a sector for overwatch. Thus, each tank in a unit has its turret at different points of the clock face. Part of the 3rd ID plan was to avoid built-up areas wherever possible and use the empty deserts to move on to Baghdad as quickly as possible. The 3rd ID was able to stay with this plan in part, but plans never survive contact with the enemy. Numerous occasions developed where the 3rd ID was forced to take towns to secure bridges or keep open the Line of Communications (LOC).



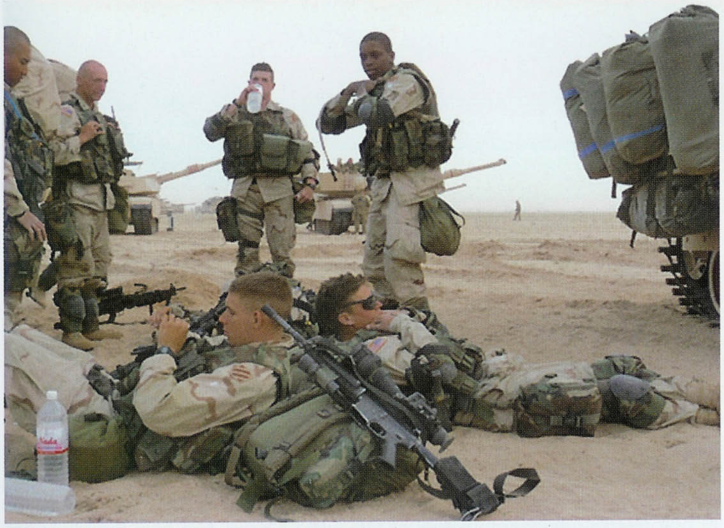
Driving at night in a large AFV (Armored Fighting Vehicle) can be treacherous. There were numerous instances throughout the war in which vehicles tumbled off narrow roads into rivers or ditches. Here, an M109 howitzer has rolled over on one such occasion. The fate of the crew is unknown.



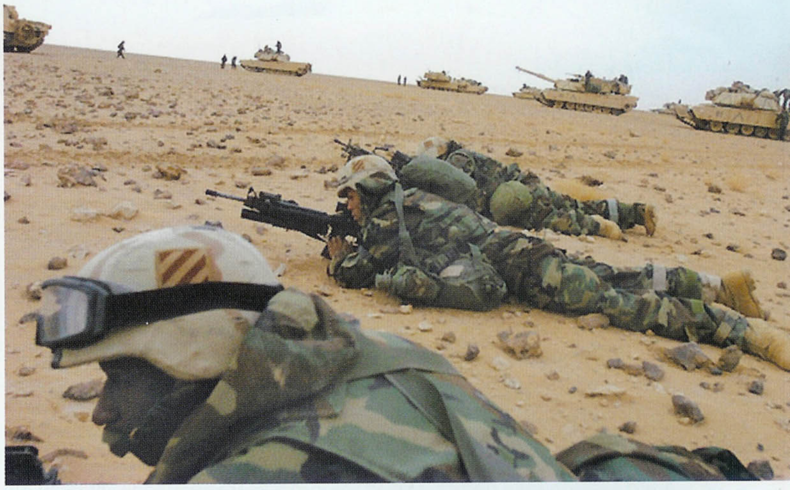
An M109 self-propelled howitzer is ready for a fire mission. The crew is in a "shoot and scoot" mode, as they are ready to move out after firing off a few rounds. Most of the enemy outposts near the border were taken out by artillery.

The 3rd ID makes a maintenance halt about four hours after crossing the border. Infantry took the time to relax as AFV crews checked the vital components of their vehicles. Since the beginning of warfare, keeping troops supplied has always been a priority. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) would be no different.

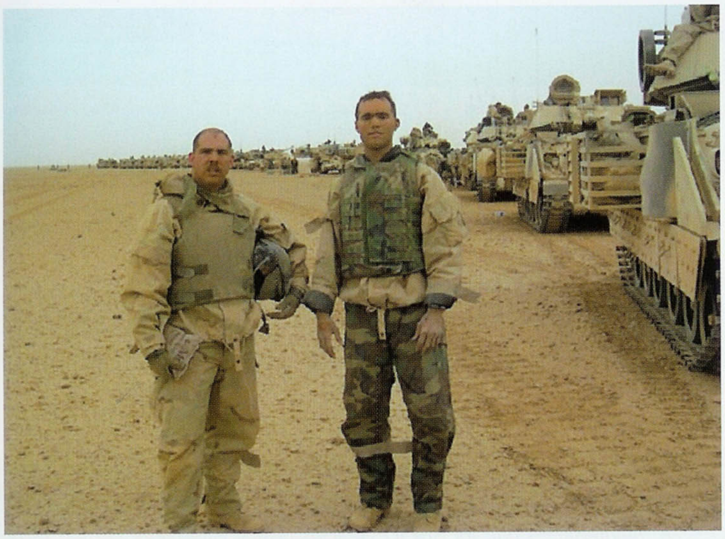
During the maintenance halt, the infantrymen emerged from their Bradleys to stretch and relax as much as possible while thinking about the inevitable first contact with the enemy.



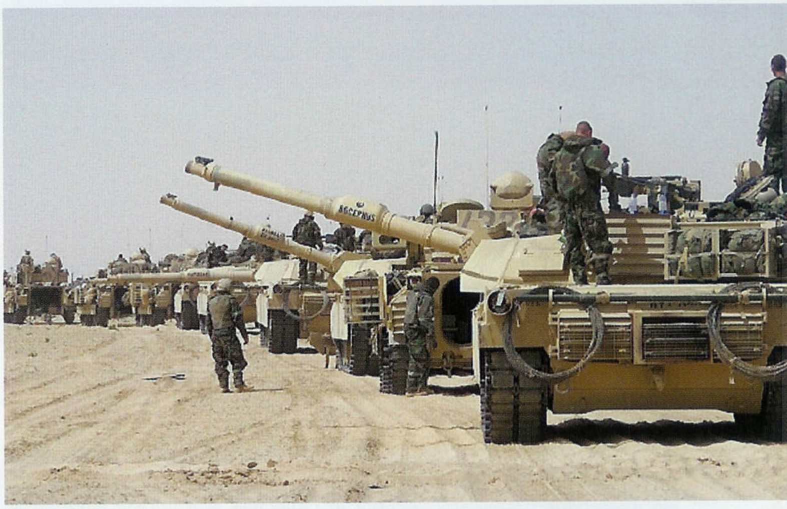
A wide variety of gear is evident on these infantrymen. The M4A1 assault rifle in the foreground is equipped with a flash light and high powered night scope. Attached to the stock is a pouch for a ready magazine.



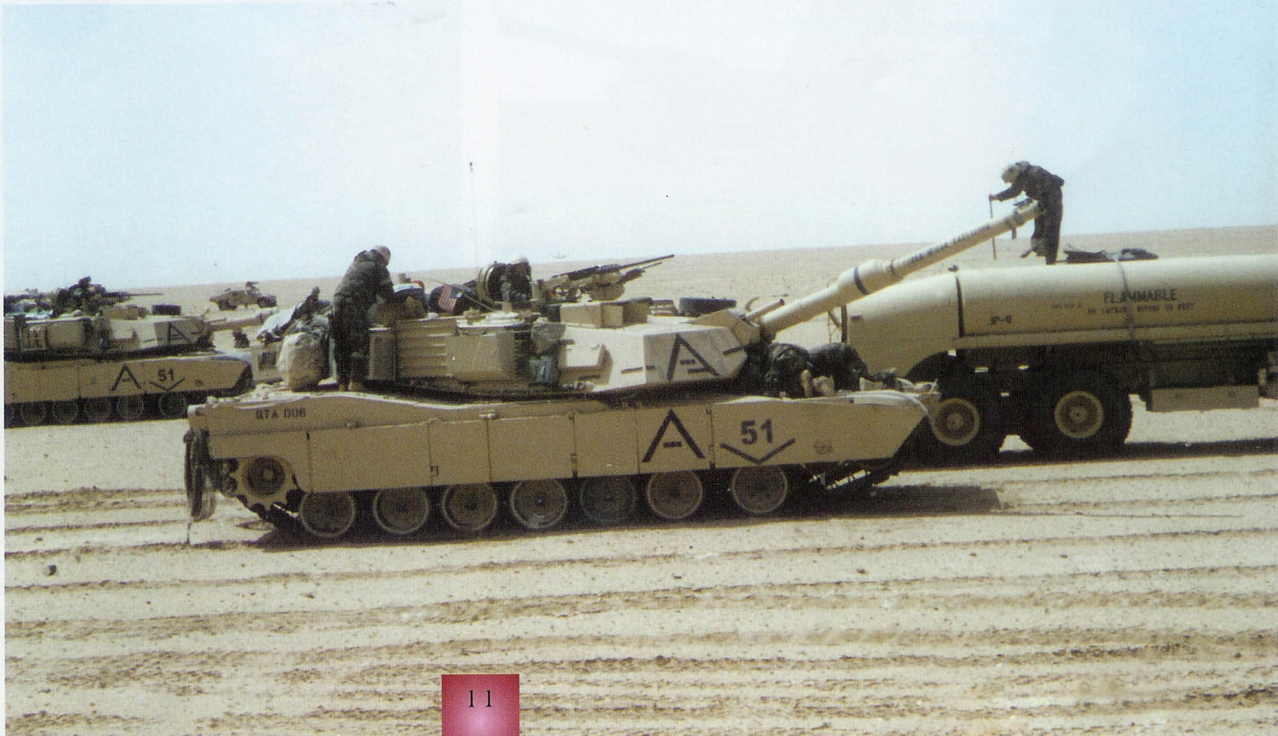
Even in relatively secure areas, some members of the infantry had to provide security. Thus, these infantrymen did not get to rest while the remainder of the units took the opportunity to do so. The nearest man wears the popular goggles worn by both the Army and Marines. There were several versions of goggles with some even sporting the brand name of the maker in large white letters on the headband.



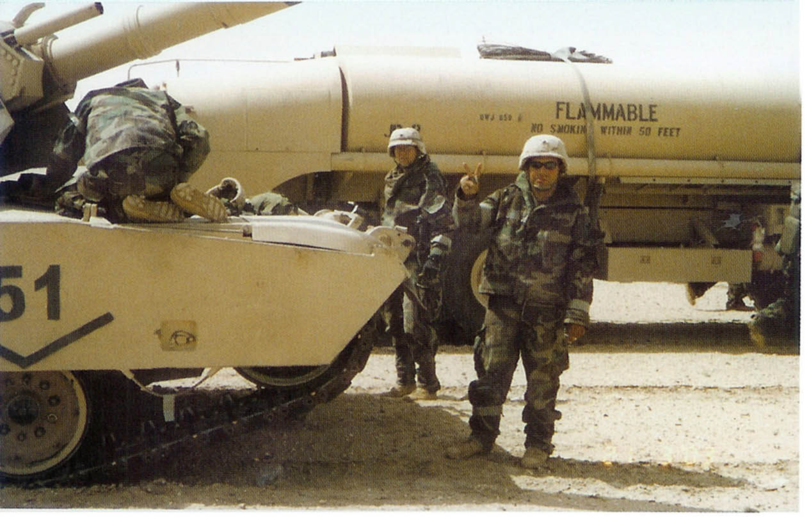
Bradley crewmen illustrate the different camouflage MOPP suits and body armor. The crewman on the left wears the traditional tanker's small flak vest while the man on the right wears IBA. The man on the right also has his sleeves slightly rolled up, which reveal the charcoal lining underneath.



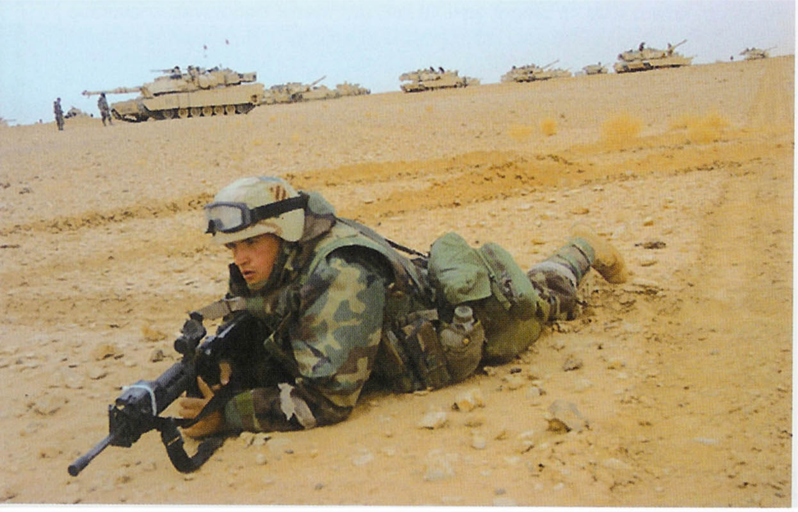
In this view of a command tank (no platoon bands are painted on the gun's bore evacuator) both jerry can racks can be seen side-by-side on the left side of the turret. This crew has used them to store packs. Hanging off the end of the gun barrel is a strip of M-9 tape.



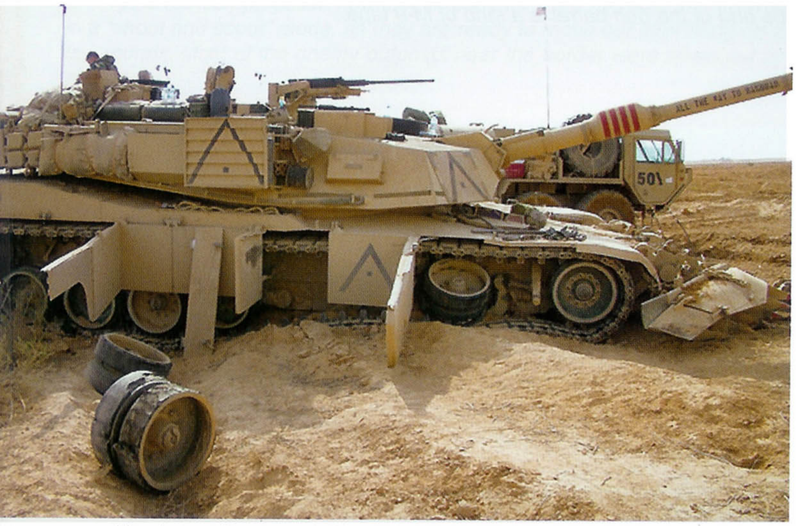
This service style gas station at Objective Martin in the southern desert is known as a ROM (Refuel on the Move). It is designed for fast throughput. As seen on this Abrams, some tanks repeated the turret marking on their side skirt. This is a 3rd Platoon vehicle of Alpha Company, 1-64 Armor.



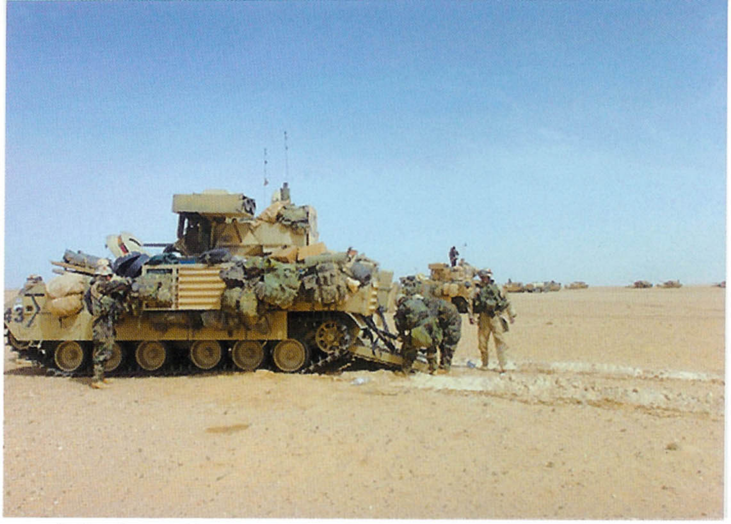
A 3rd Platoon tank participates in refueling operations conducted by an M978 Oshkosh 8x8 fuel tanker in the background. M-9 tape can be seen on the sideskirt foothold. Two markings indicate this is a vehicle from the 3rd Platoon - the downward facing chevron and the blue barrel band on the bore evacuator. This is one company that did not have Bradleys in the 3rd Platoon.



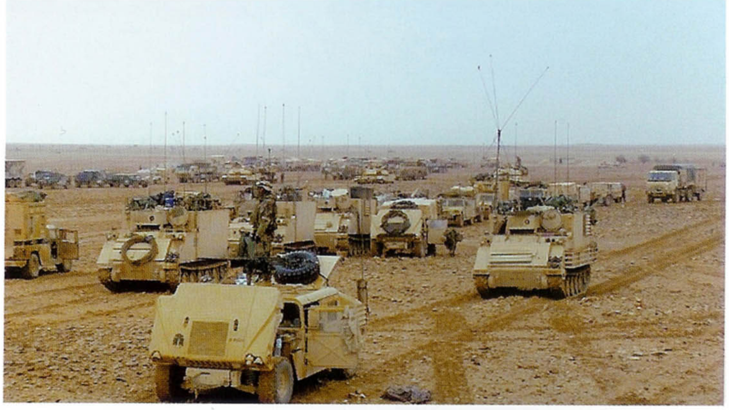
An infantryman conducts security at Objective Martin. His weapon is equipped with a PAC-4 laser sight and a scope. It seems to be held on with a zip cuff.



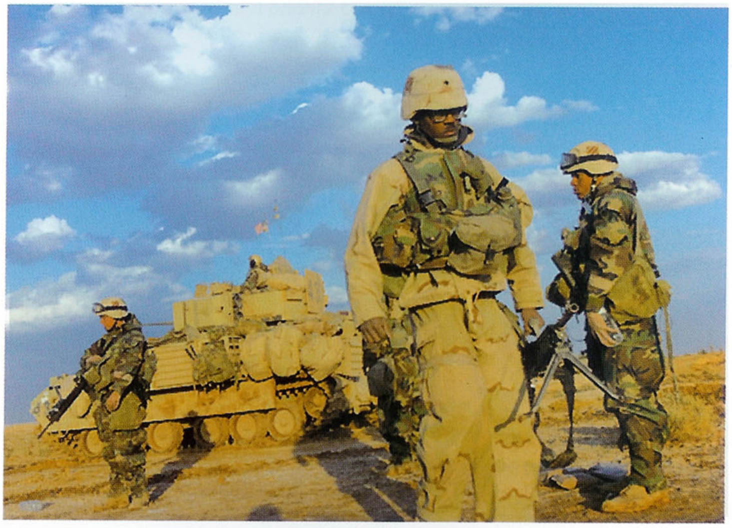
Harsh terrain caused this tank to suffer roadwheel shear while on the move towards an enemy target. Roadwheel shear was not uncommon in Iraq, but losing more than one roadwheel per side was rare. Here, several road wheels were torn off at the same time. It was later determined that "ALL THE WAY TO BAGHDAD" was not going to make it to Baghdad after all, and would be used for parts. Thus, the M88 crew that stripped the tank took the gun barrel with its name on it all the way to Baghdad. Velcro strips from pre-war training with MILES gear can still be seen.



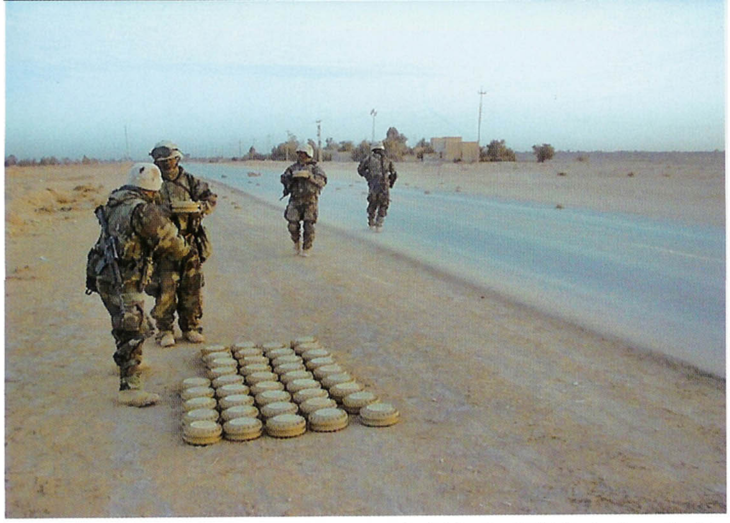
A Bradley waiting to refuel at Objective Martin. Not only did tanks get the jerry can racks, but Bradleys and M113s got them as well. The rack is just to the left of the CIP (Combat Identification Panel).



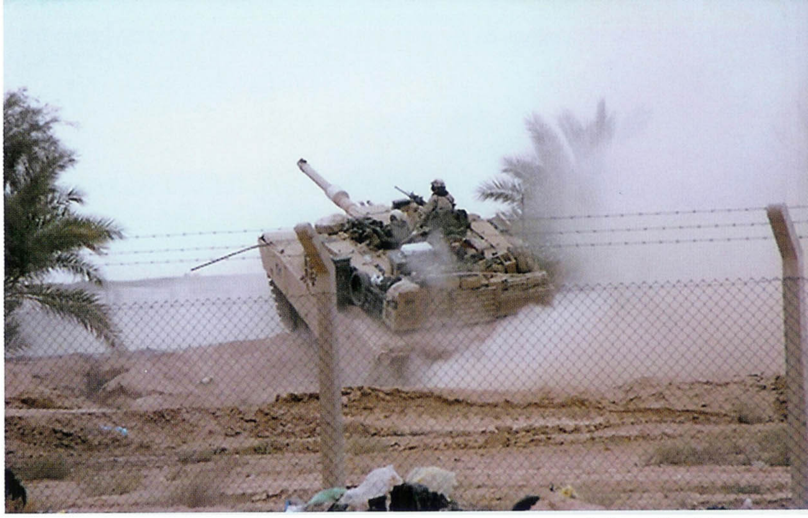
A maintenance halt for 3rd ID vehicles. Many HMMWVs carried extra tires, and they would be sorely needed as units fought through built-up areas that had been previously shelled. Many HMMWVs suffered flat tires when they ran over shrapnel. Vehicles were still able to continue on, however, due to their run-flat tires.



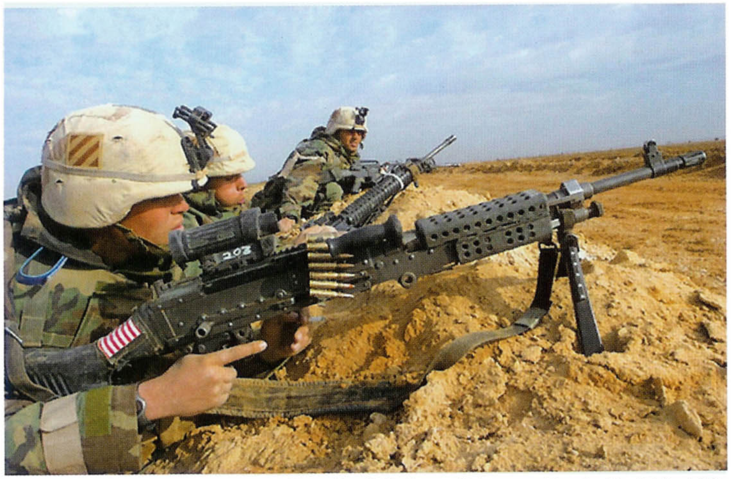
These men await the order to remount their Bradleys. The machine gunner in the foreground carries pouches for his MG ammunition. With the modular system of the IBA vests it seems that no two men carried the same load or equipment. In the early phases of the war it rained in southern Iraq, and so mud was evident on men and machine. The Bradley in the background still has mud on the running gear.



Engineers gather mines from a hastily laid minefield that attempted to slow the advance of the 3rd ID. Since the 3rd ID used a number of approach routes to Baghdad (especially the open desert in the early phases), it was impossible for the Iraqis to slow the offensive with mines.



An M1A1 Abrams crests a small embankment at speed. Described by some as the "Combat Cadillac", the Abrams provides an exceptionally smooth ride, thanks to its suspension system.

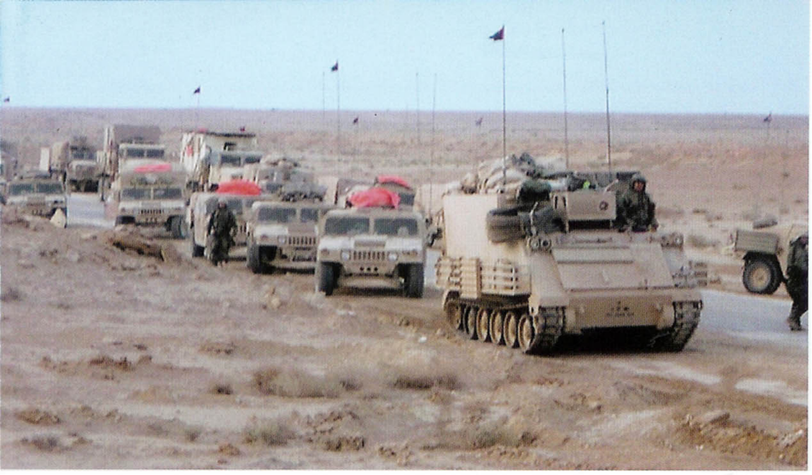


This M240 gunner has placed a US flag sticker on the butt of his MG. The M249 SAW and M240 have largely replaced the M60 MG in the Army inventory. The middle man has a PAC-4 laser sight attached to his M16, and two of the three men have mounts attached to their helmets for NVGs.

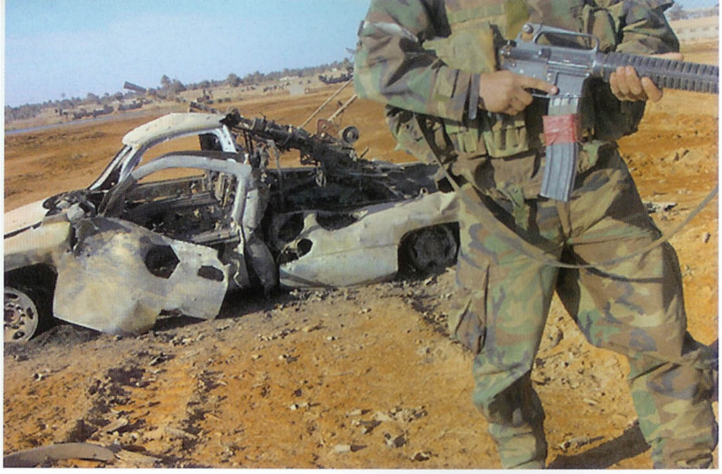
Najaf was a large town that was hotly contested. These enemy soldiers were killed during a nighttime fight outside the town. The Iraqis, and especially the paramilitaries, rarely showed respect for the US imaging devices and the killing power of their weapons. The enemy commonly hid behind mounds of dirt, not realizing they were afforded very little protection in such instances.

This pickup truck was being used during the night to ferry troops and supplies. An MPAT (Multipurpose Anti Tank projectile) destroyed it. The MPAT is the newest tank round carried by the M1 and was supplied in limited quantities for OIF. It is ideal for use against soft targets, despite what its name suggests.

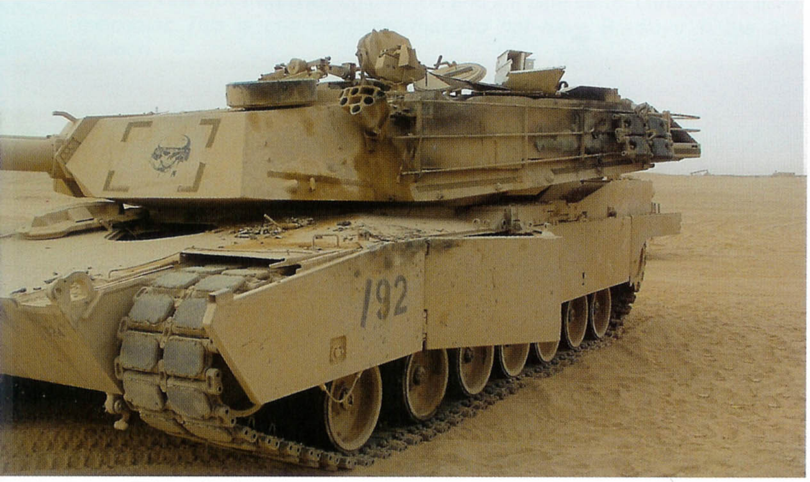
EPWs (Enemy Prisoners of War) are zip cuffed outside Najaf at Objective Rams. The planners named some of the objectives after their favorite NFL football teams. Others were Objective Lions, Bears, Chargers, Titans, and Saints. EPWs did not surrender in the large numbers as they did in the First Gulf War. There were two principal reasons for this. One, they were fighting for their own country this time, and believed the propaganda churned out by the Ba'ath party. The second reason is that death squads roamed the battlefield. If Iraqis did not fight they would be killed or their families would be harmed by these squads.



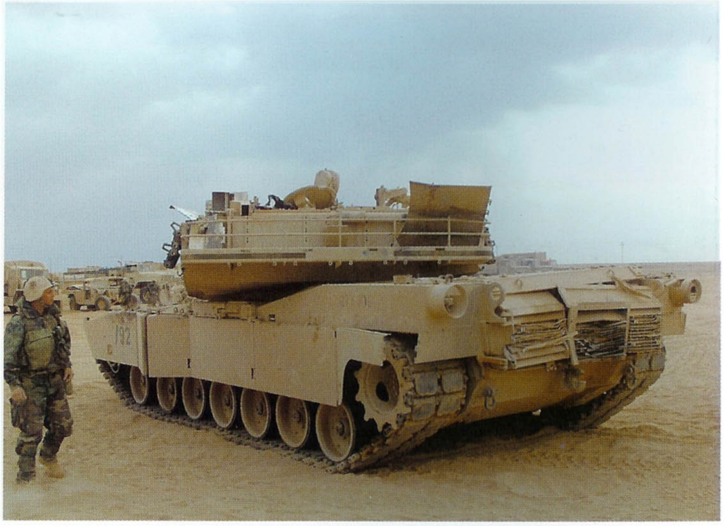
A convoy is parked at the side of the road, awaiting the next command to advance. The nearest vehicle is an M1068A3, with HMMWVs and 5-ton trucks strung out behind it. A number of vehicles carry brightly colored air identification panels on their roofs.



A sabot round took out this 'technical' which was armed with an AA gun in the rear bed of the truck. The infantryman in the foreground has taped two magazines together to facilitate a quick magazine change in the middle of a firefight.

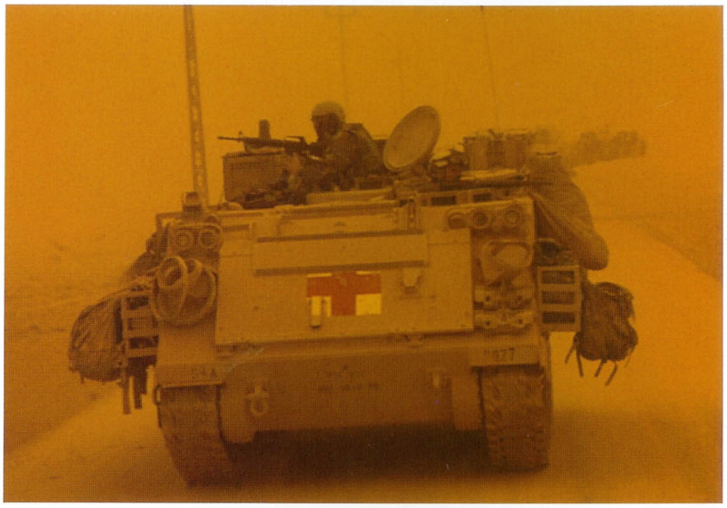


This 7th Cavalry Abrams was knocked out by friendly fire at an intersection near Najaf. While in column formation with Bradleys out front, B Troop was confronted with technicals, heavy machine gun fire, and RPGs. While this Abrams was being struck by RPGs in the front left of the turret, it was also being hit by Bradley 25mm fire as the Bradley traversed its turret. The 25mm rounds penetrated the rear plate, knocking out the Abrams. To top it off, this Abram's wingman rammed the tank in the rear, temporarily hooking up the two tanks. All of this took place in about 45 seconds in the beginning stages of a large sand storm. (Busack)

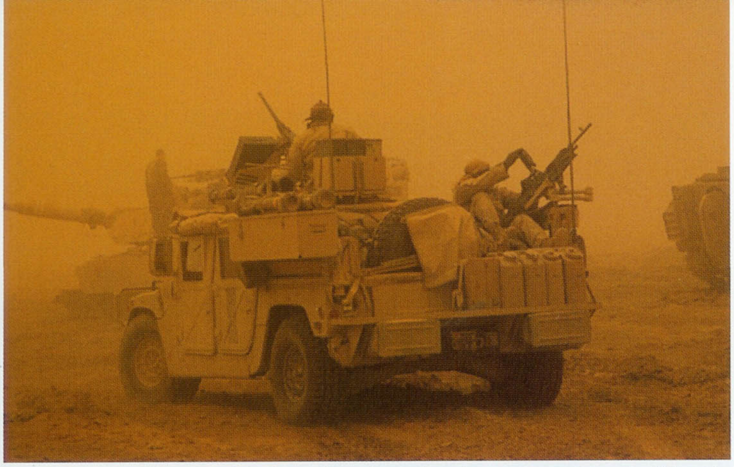


Nearby was another Bradley and the Abrams crew was able to bail out and get inside the Bradley. A few days later this M1A1 and another M1A1 that was also knocked out, were recovered. (Busack)

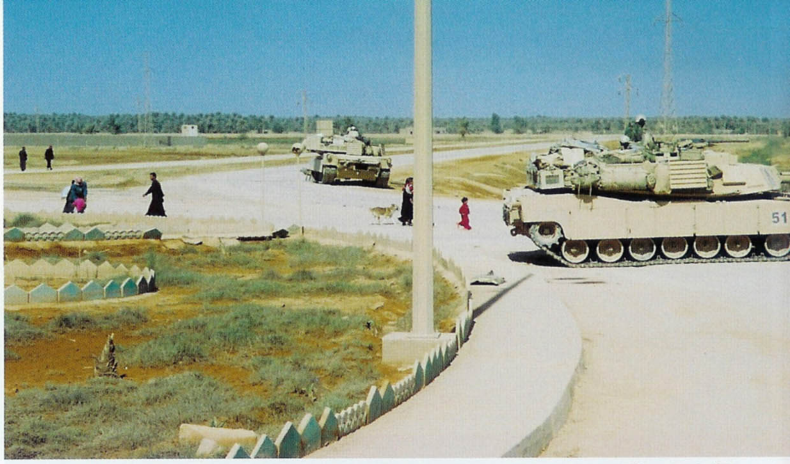
On 24 March a large sandstorm that lasted three days began. The 3rd ID used the opportunity to take an operational pause to consolidate its forces, which were beginning to be stretched out along with its LOC. Contrary to popular media opinion of the time, neither the Marines nor the 3rd ID stopped fighting. They merely stopped advancing. Fighting was still intense in all areas, as the enemy, at least on a tactical basis, attempted to use the storm as concealment for local attacks. However, on a strategic level the Iraqis failed to take advantage of the storm.



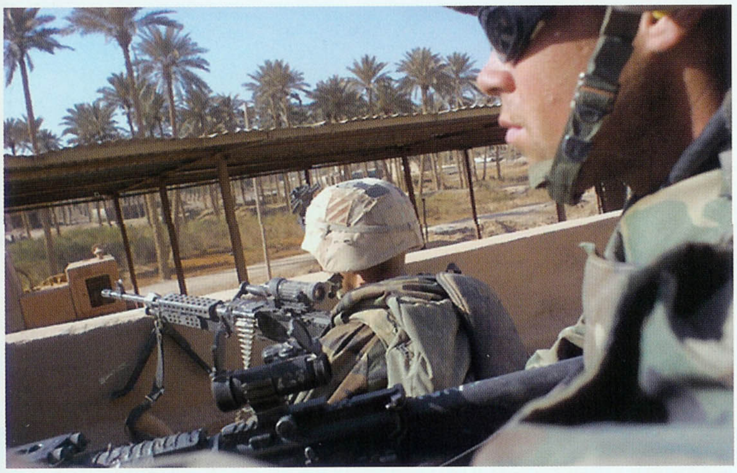
Both the driver and commander of this M113 ambulance have armed themselves with M16s to take on the enemy infantry who tried to infiltrate 3rd ID positions during the storm. This M113 is also equipped with a large locker on its roof.



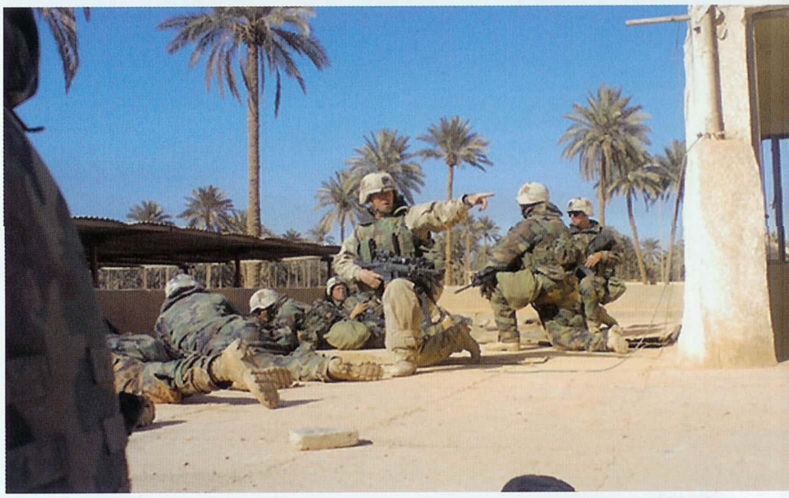
Not all soldiers could take refuge from the storm due to constant threats from the enemy. This HMMWV has an M240 attached to its right rear corner, and has to be manned despite the storm. Visibility was reduced to mere meters and vehicles like the HMMWVs were at a greater disadvantage since they did not have thermal sights to help guide them through the storm.



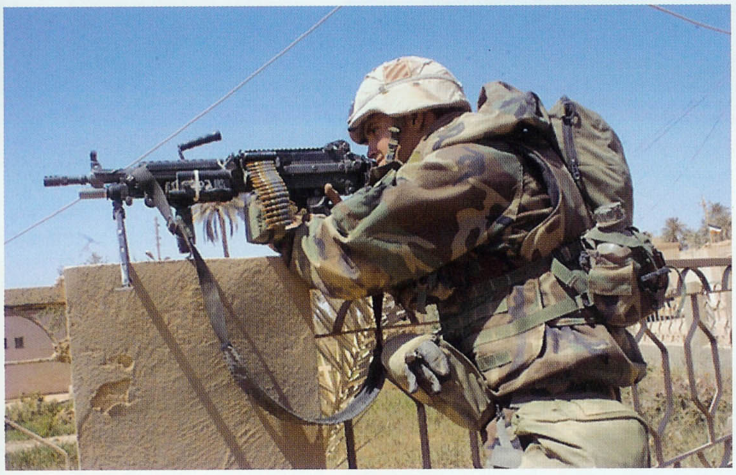
Civilians flee Najaf as the 3rd ID attacks into the town. The 3rd ID wished to bypass as many towns as possible as the aim was for Baghdad to be taken as quickly to avoid a protracted fight. Thus, at least in the south, where there were expected to be only regular Iraqi army units and Fedayeen militia, bypassed units were not expected to be a threat. However, it soon became apparent that LOCs would be threatened by these bypassed units, and so more city fighting took place than was planned.



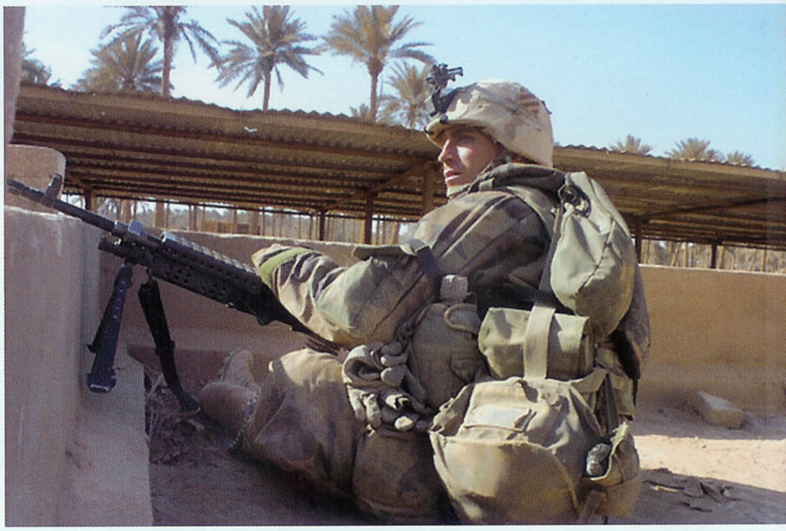
An M240 gunner searches for targets as his squad mate searches another quadrant. Both have a powered scope attached to their weapons. Most US Army regular units had some training in house-to-house fighting, which over the decades, has come to be an expected form of fighting. In the US several bases have specially built "towns" to practice such tactics.



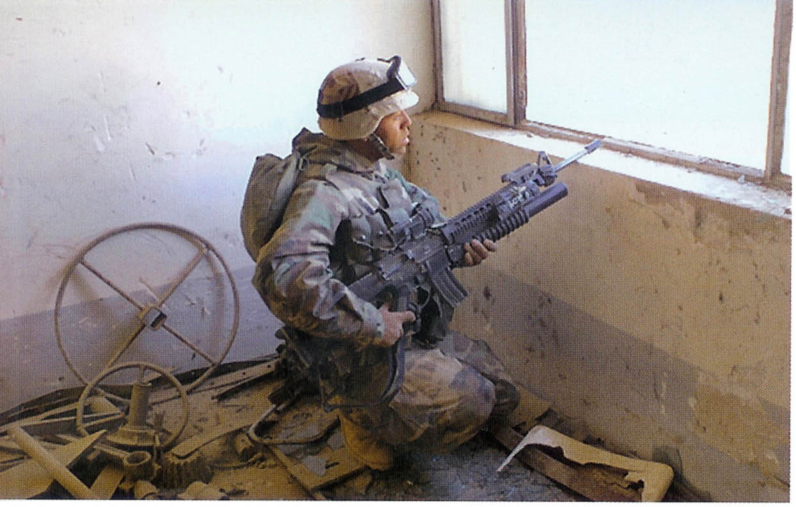
A firefight ensues as the men take cover on a rooftop. Yet, despite the danger, the squad leader exposes himself to give directions to his men. Some men wear desert camouflaged MOPP suits and others have woodland camouflage versions. All the men have desert boots, however.



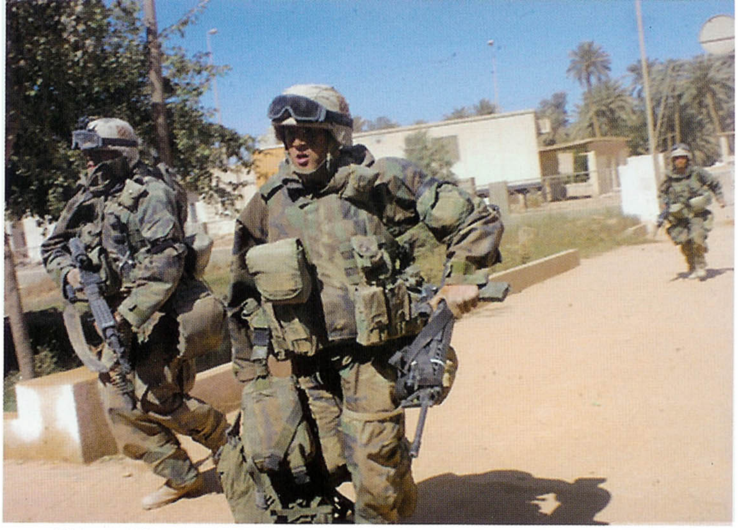
A SAW gunner provides cover while his squad mates sprint across open ground in Najaf. He carries his night sights in his back pack. For the 3rd ID the battle for Najaf lasted from 25 March – 28 March until the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions relieved it. It was estimated that 1,400 – 2,100 paramilitaries were committed to the fight against the 3rd ID.



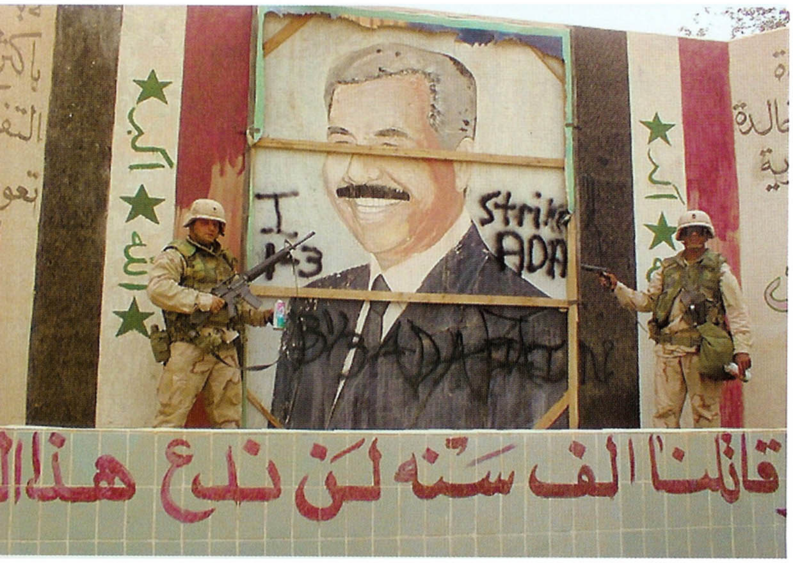
This M240 gunner keeps overwatch from atop a building in Najaf. He also has night sights in his backpack. His gas mask is hanging at his lower left. The squad's Bradley remained nearby in the street looking for targets, and was ready for the men to remount if the situation dictated it.



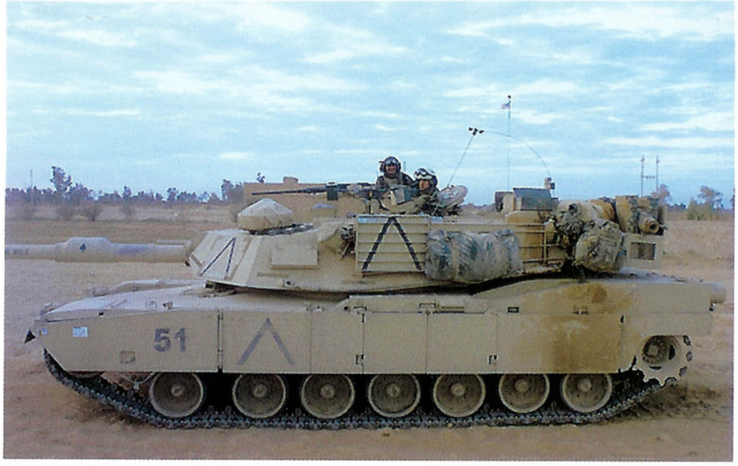
This infantryman has an M203 grenade launcher attached to his M16A2 rifle. The sight for the M203 is folded down just behind the front sight of the M16. The M203 fires a variety of 40mm grenades and has an effective range of 350 meters.



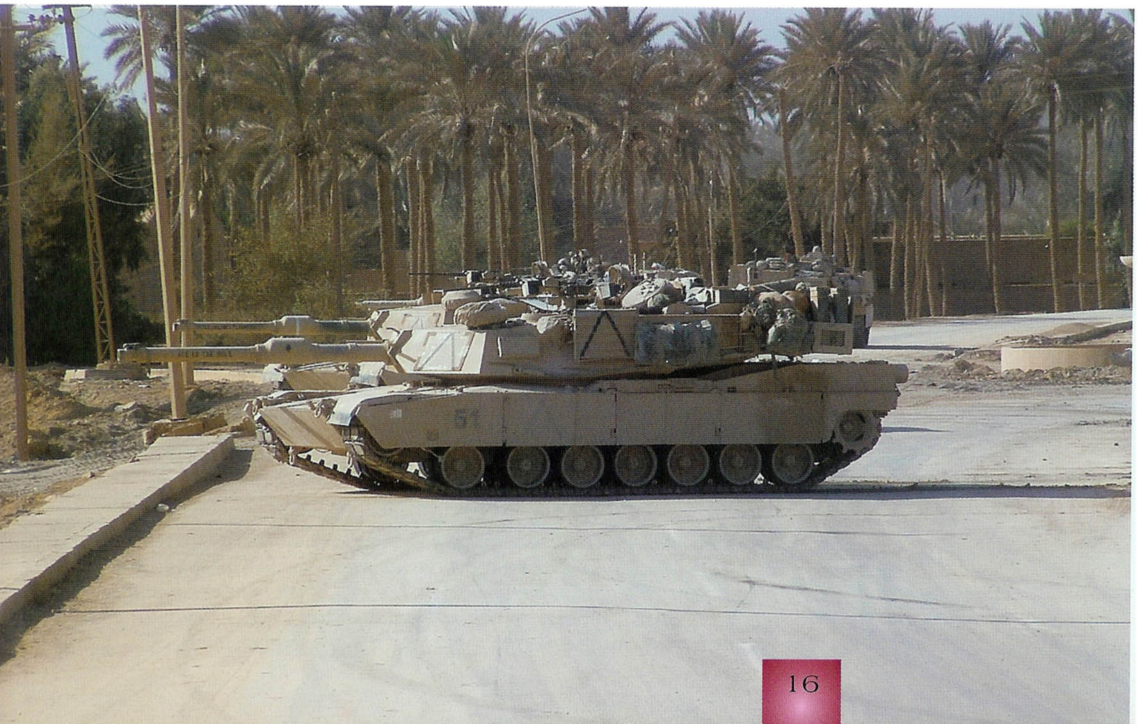
This soldier appears to be a Combat Life Saver. He carries what may be a medic bag in his right hand. Combat Life Savers are riflemen certified in basic medical skills, but their main job remains as a "trigger puller."



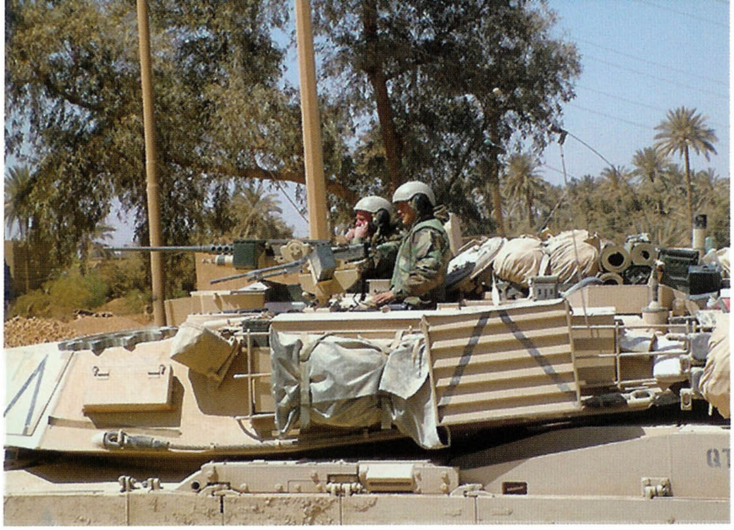
Men from the 1-3 ADA (Air Defense Artillery) pose in front of a Saddam mural. Both men are still holding the spray cans they used to add their moniker. Taking pieces of a Saddam poster became a sort of ritual for the advancing forces, as well as shooting up murals and statues, although the civilians probably participated just as much.



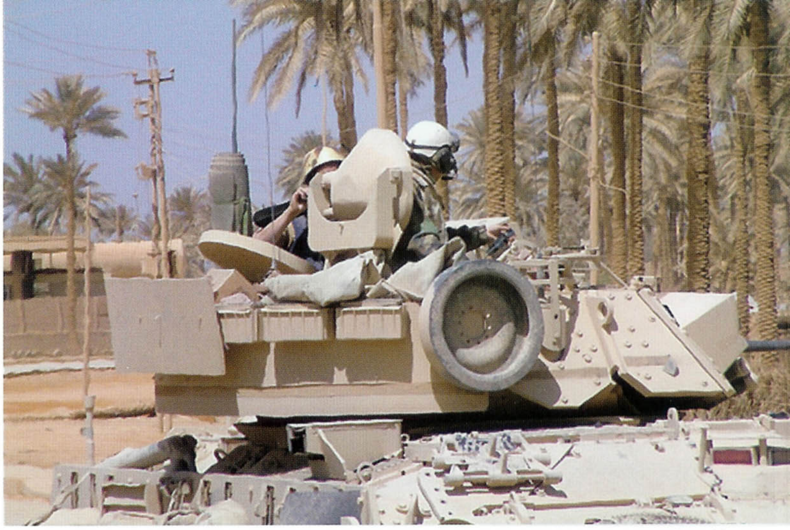
A close up of "ACE IN THE HOLE". Unlike other wars, the names of the vehicles had no role as to unit identification. The chevrons and numbers were for that use. The chevron on the second side skirt panel is not related to the number 51 to its left. That chevron is mirroring the chevron on the CIP, and stands for 'A' Company. There are no platoon dots since this is a command tank.



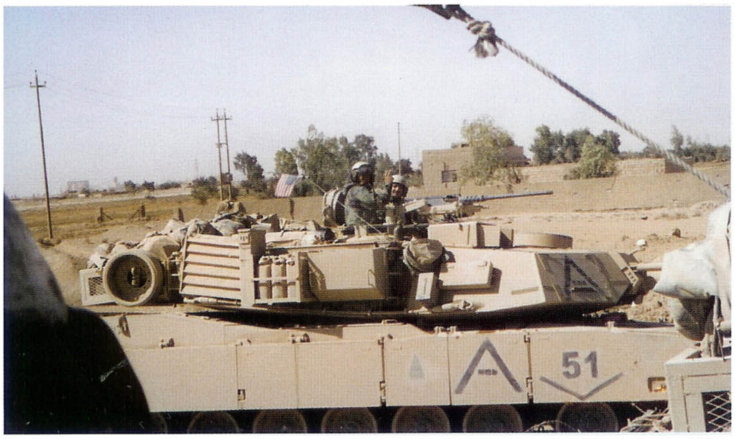
"ACE IN THE HOLE", the XO, and other tanks from 1-64 help secure Najaf. The lack of a chevron around the large side skirt number indicates this is a command tank, as does the lack of a barrel band around the bore evacuator.



In the position where most crews kept a spare road wheel, this crew has mounted a sprocket gear. Their crew tent hangs off the side of the turret next to the CIP. The CIP was designed to provide a unique heat signature for thermal sights, thus preventing friendly fire incidents.

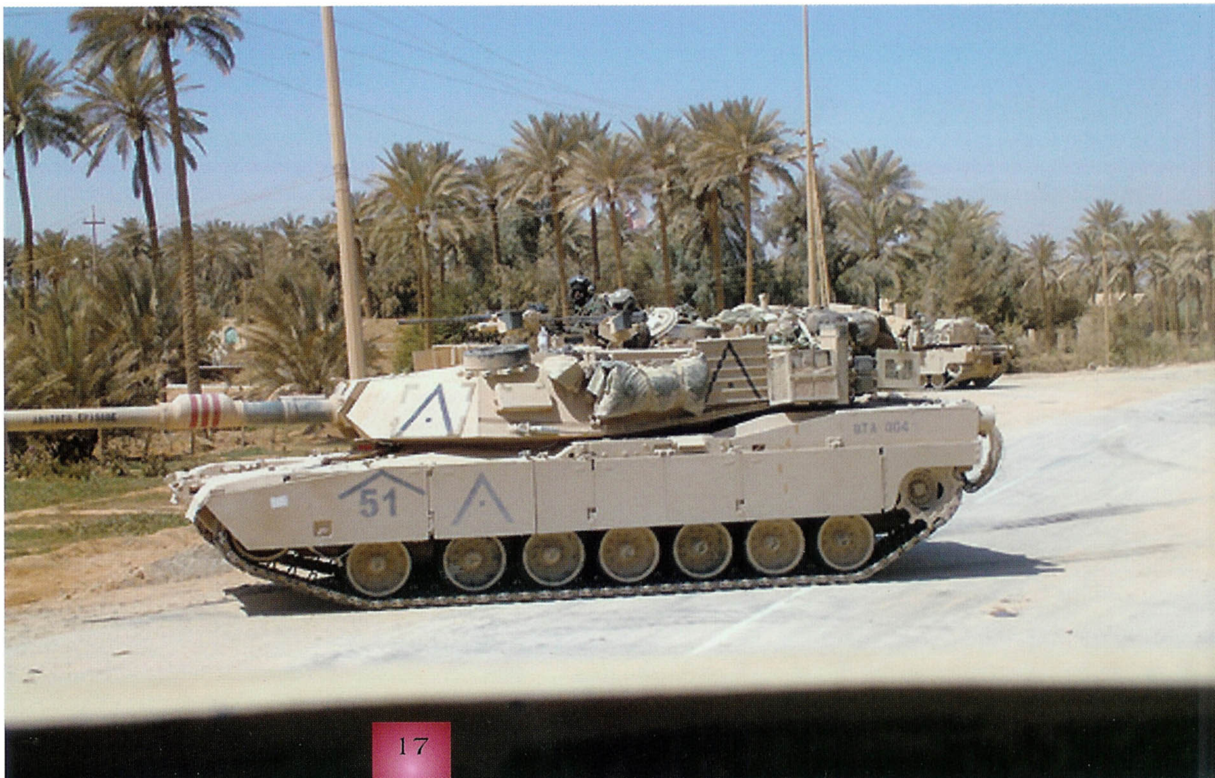


An embedded reporter pokes through the gunner's hatch to talk with the commander of this Bradley. The reporter's blue flak vest can just be made out behind the hatch. Many AFV crews had a habit of putting their sleeping mats around the bases of the antennas, as seen here.



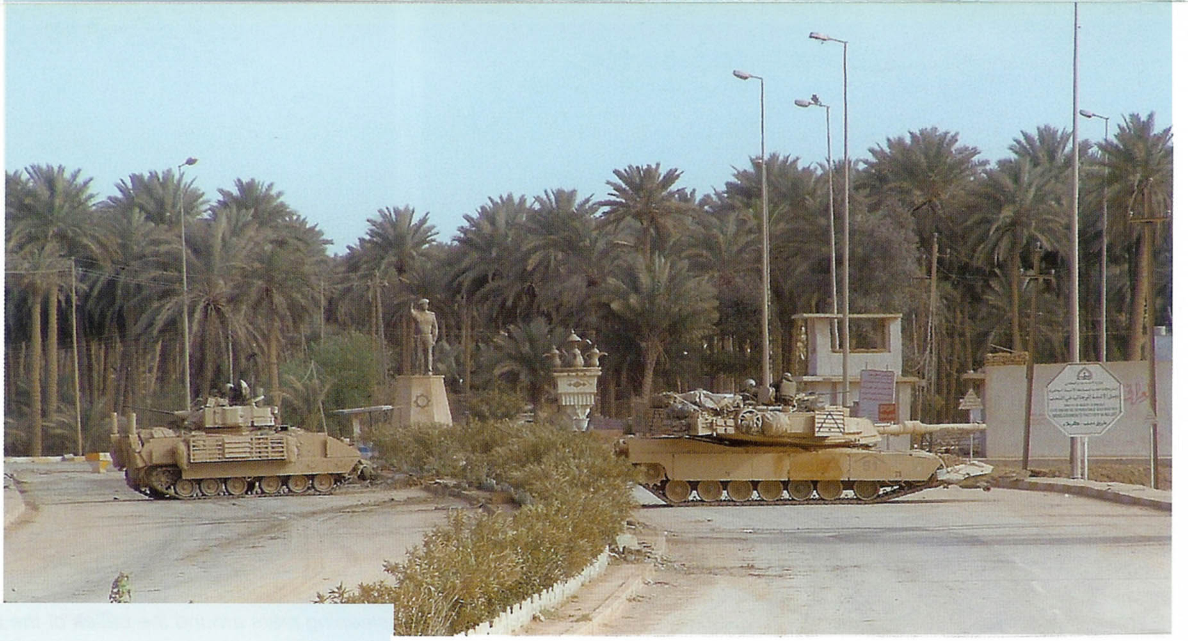
The exhaust deflector shield is clearly shown here hanging next to a jerry can rack. Most crews used the deflector shield to stow loose items such as oil cans and lubricant spray cans. A 120mm mortar ammunition can is attached to the jerry can rack. It was also used for storage. This crew has two spare roadwheels, a practice which was not common.

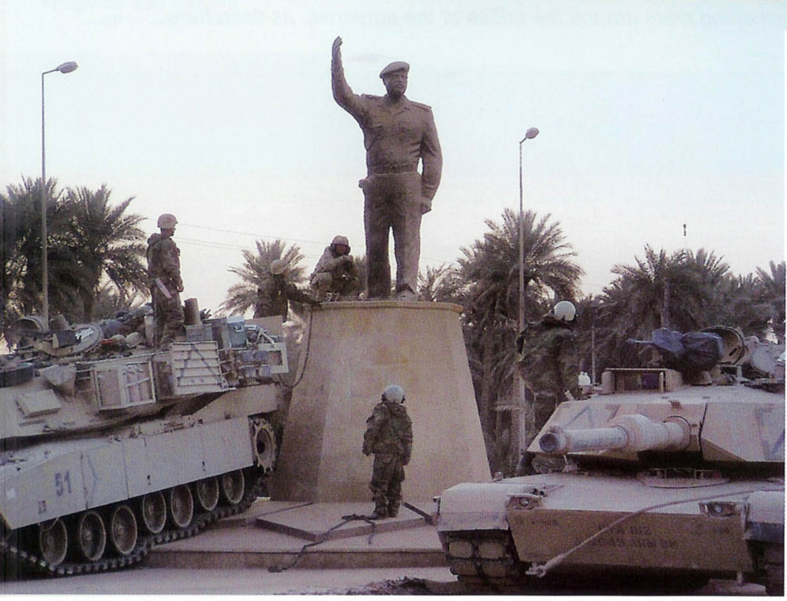
A SAW gunner looks for the enemy as fire from small arms flies over the heads of these 3rd ID soldiers. The shape of the removable armor plate shows through the vest of the gunner.



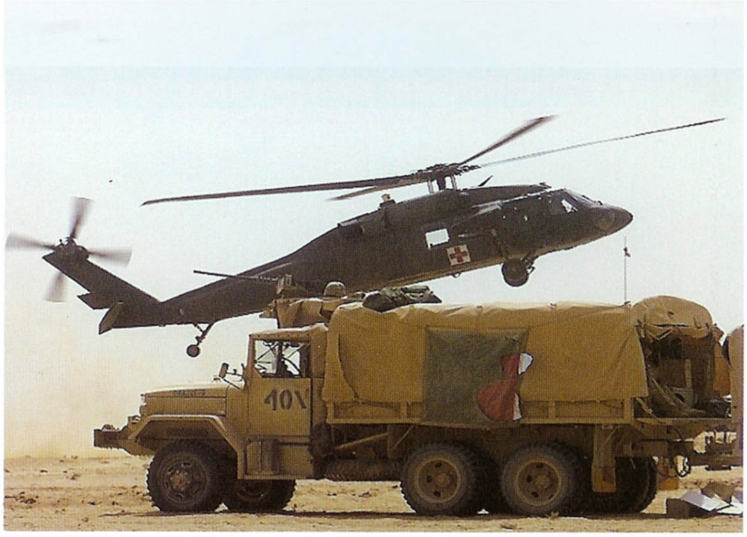
This side view of "ANOTHER EPISODE" shows the crew tent hanging next to the smoke discharger, the CIP next to that, and the jerry can rack next to that. Attached to the jerry can rack is a mortar ammunition can used for more storage. The thermal shroud on the gun barrel comes in three parts. The part closest to the turret was replaced just before the beginning of the war, and is green in color. Most replacement parts were still in the original green color, and so many vehicles throughout OIF show parts in green.

Armor secures a traffic circle near a bridge in Najaf. During this lull Iraqi civilians came up to the crews and gave them water. The same statue in this photo would be torn down not long after this photo was taken.



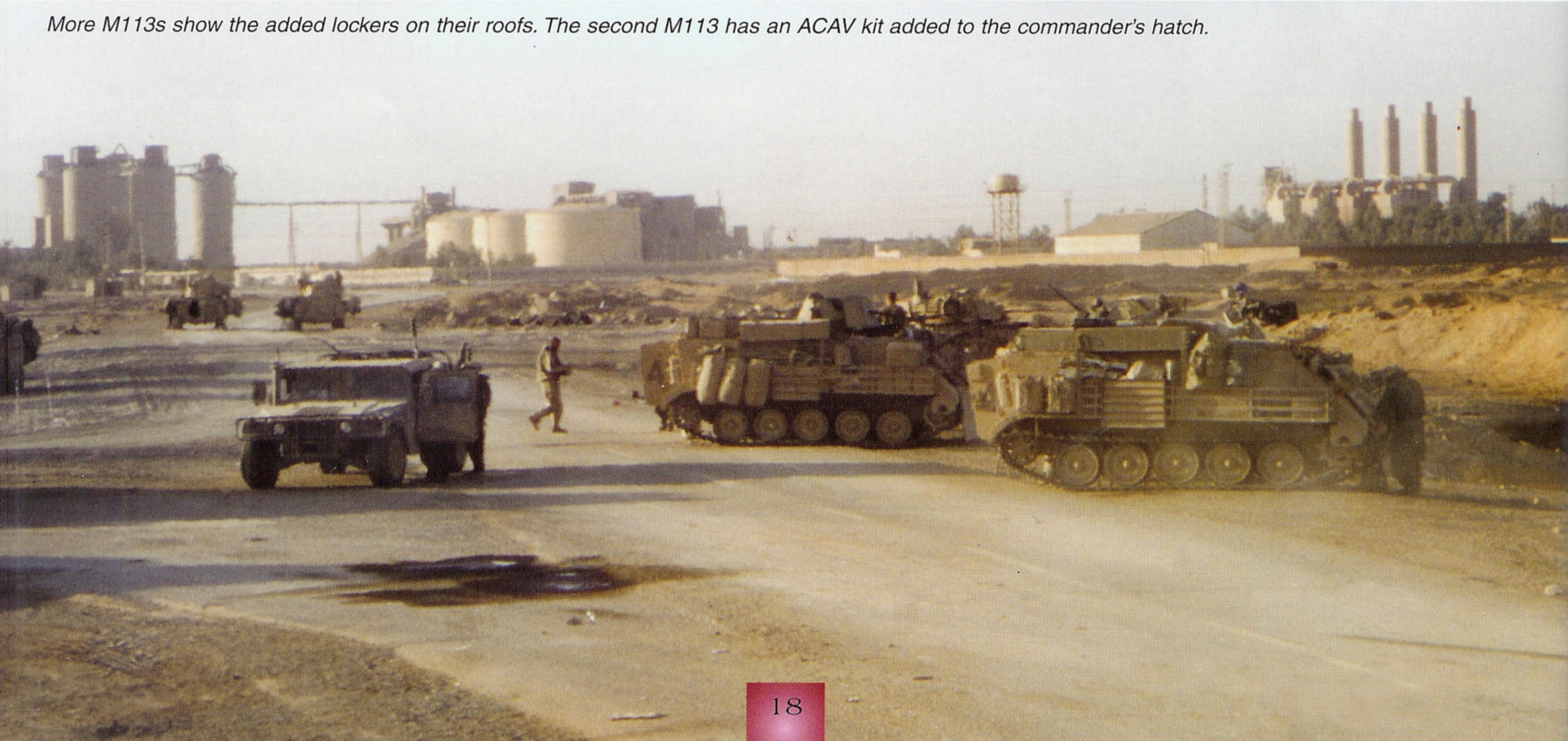


Sgt Olson crouches down as enemy small arms fire reacts to the American crews preparing to take down a Saddam Hussein statue. It is believed that this was the first Saddam statue to be torn down during the war. It took two attempts before eventually the bronze statue came down.

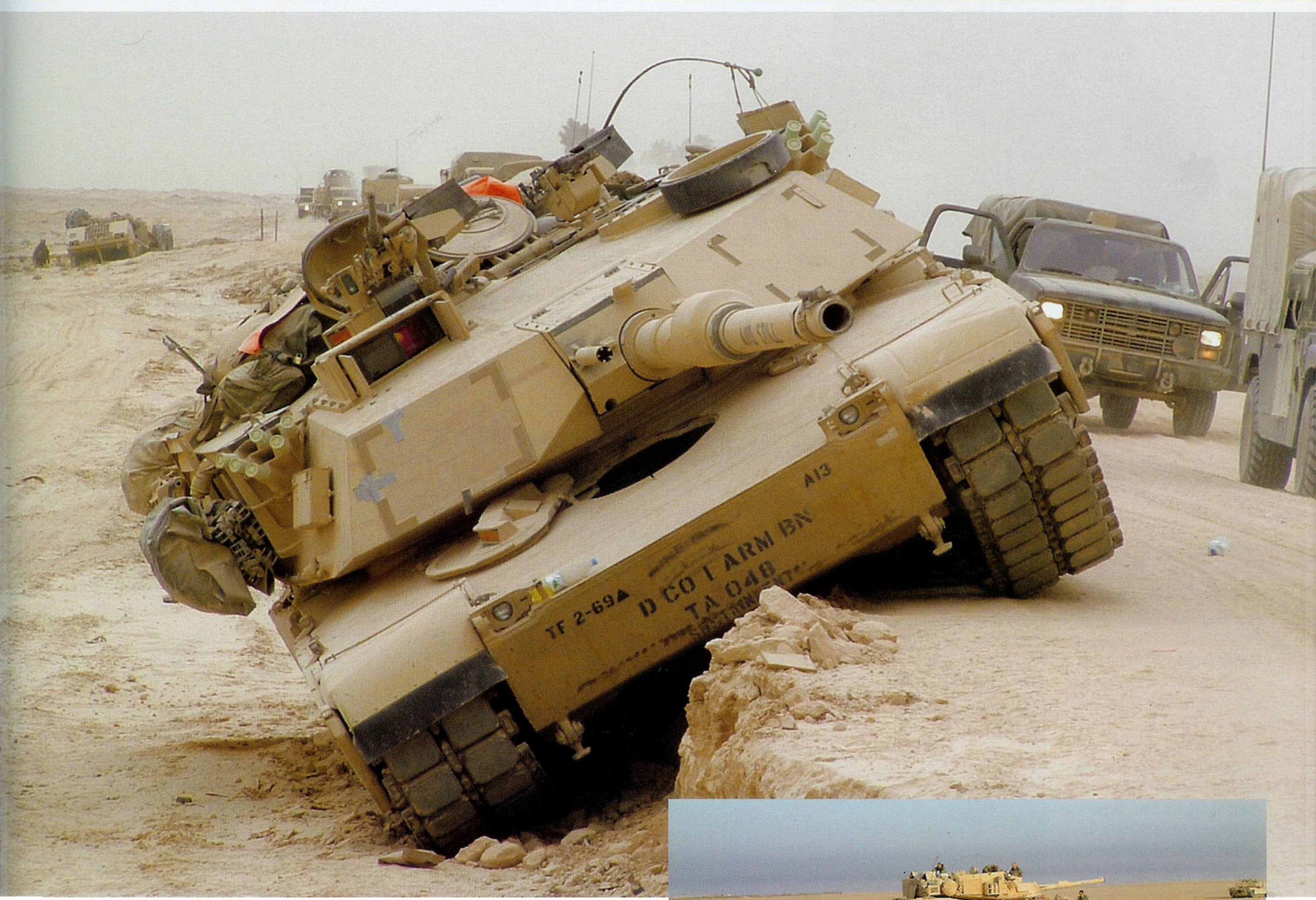


A Medevac Blackhawk helicopter arrives to pick up wounded. Medical units were so close to the fighting that a number of times the medics from MASH units had to prepare for actual combat themselves.

More M113s show the added lockers on their roofs. The second M113 has an ACAV kit added to the commander's hatch.



CLOSING ON BAGHDAD



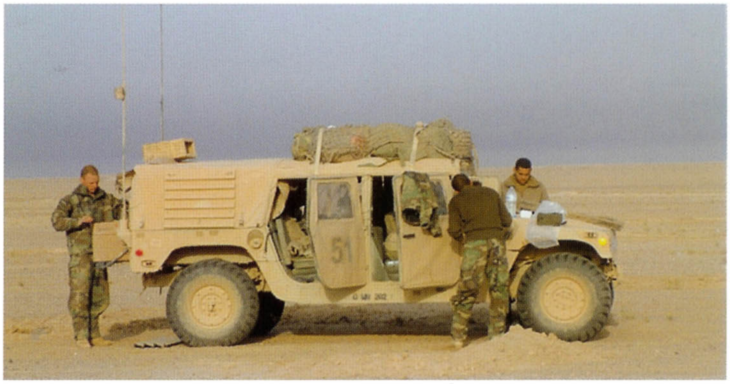
Evidence of how difficult it is to drive in low visibility situations. Neither the driver of the rolled HEMTT in the background, nor the driver of this Abrams from the 3rd Brigade's 2-69 Armor could see the edge of the raised road. (Busack)

A crewman looks through his turret bin as they await further orders at a refueling point. The extended bustle rack is evident as well as one of the jerry can racks, and two coils of razor wire for security purposes.

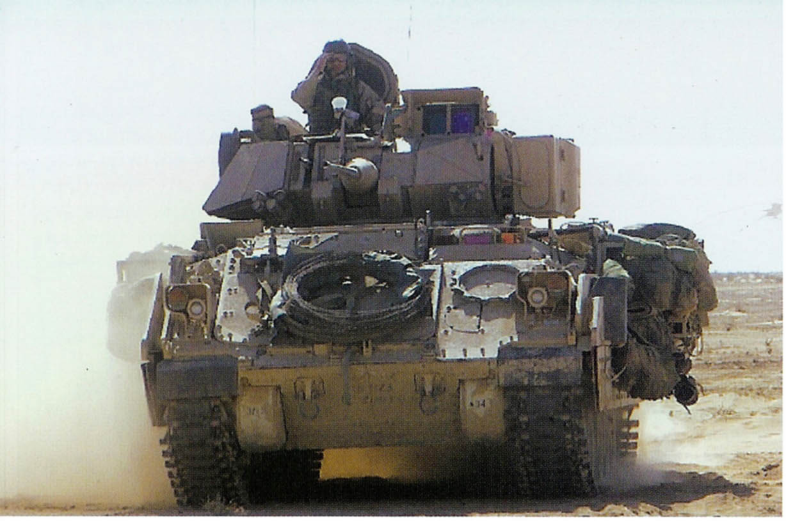
On 1 April the 3rd Brigade isolated the Republican Guard south of Baghdad in the Karbala area. This allowed the 2nd Brigade to bypass Karbala and press on towards Baghdad after the 1st Brigade secured the Karbala Gap. It was feared that the Republican Guard would make a defensive stand here since it was good tank country and ideal for artillery kill boxes. However, tank combat never really materialized since the Iraqis mostly attempted to hide their tanks from air attack, and any Iraqi artillery was quickly dealt with through the use of counter-battery fire. Thus, the initiative always remained with the 3rd ID.

69th Armor again secured a key bridge over the meandering Euphrates River at Objective Peach. Numerous explosives were planted by the enemy, but due to the boldness of the attack at Objective Peach, the bridge was captured intact. To help facilitate the crossing, engineers also constructed a pontoon bridge at Objective Peach.

The 1st Brigade then attacked toward Baghdad International Airport located on the western side of Baghdad while the 3rd Brigade maneuvered to the northwest of the city to prevent any reinforcements from joining the battle from the north. Meanwhile, 2nd Brigade mopped up the ineffective Medina Division on 3 and 4 April. By this point the airport had been secured and the ring around Baghdad was solidifying, along with the help of the Marines who were now on the eastern outskirts of the city.

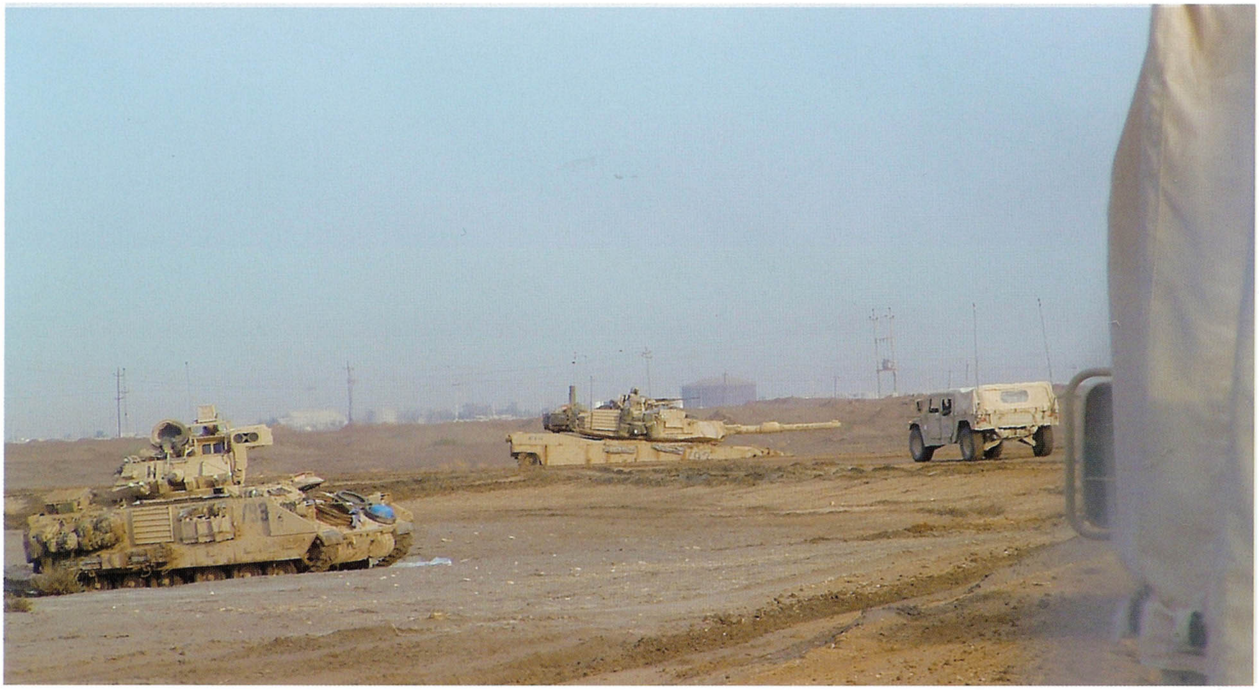


Most HMMWVs had a folding storage rack on the tailgate. No HMMWVs with the 3rd ID during OIF 1 were up-armored. Up-armored HMMWVs didn't come into theatre until follow-on units arrived after the fall of Baghdad.

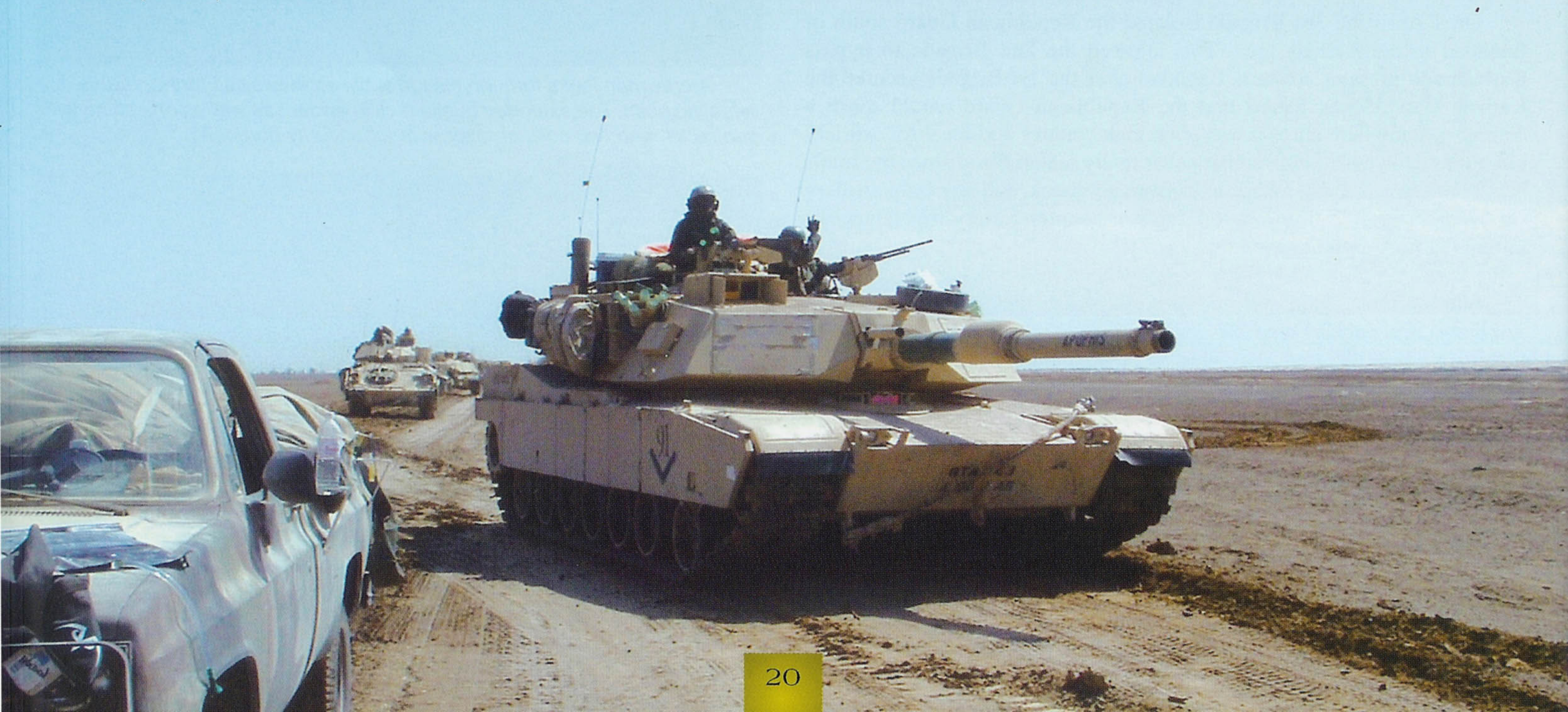


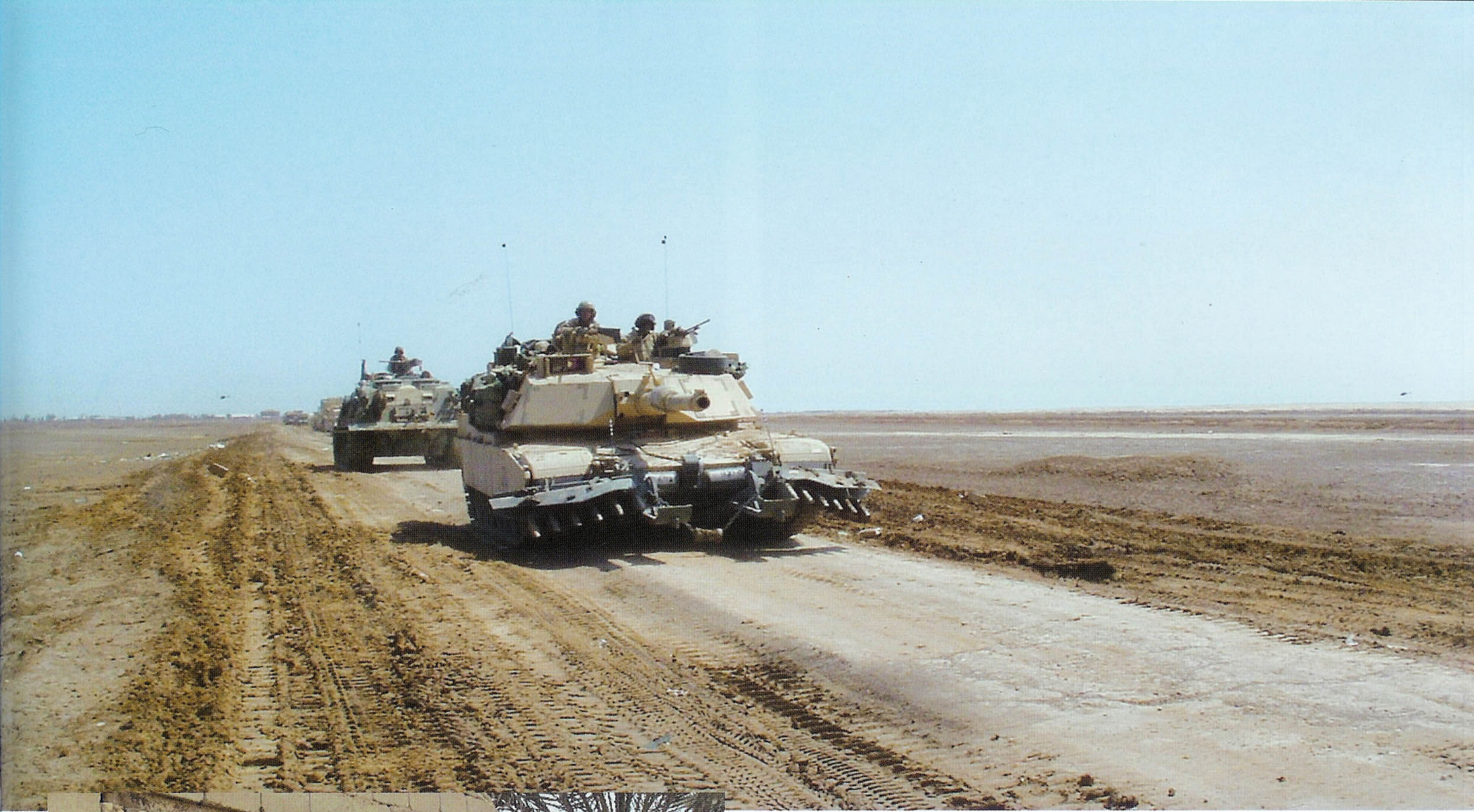
Bradleys, as well as M1A1s, have a subtle anti-slip coating over most of the top surfaces. In this light, the anti-slip coating can be seen on the front of the vehicle. This Bradley has a rack on both sides of the vehicle.

A 7th Cavalry Bradley has its turret TOW launcher deployed as it provides overwatch for a passing unit. The 7th Cav was an independent scout unit attached to the 3rd ID for OIF. It also had its own helicopter assets which proved useful while it was at the tip of the 3rd ID's advance. (Busack)



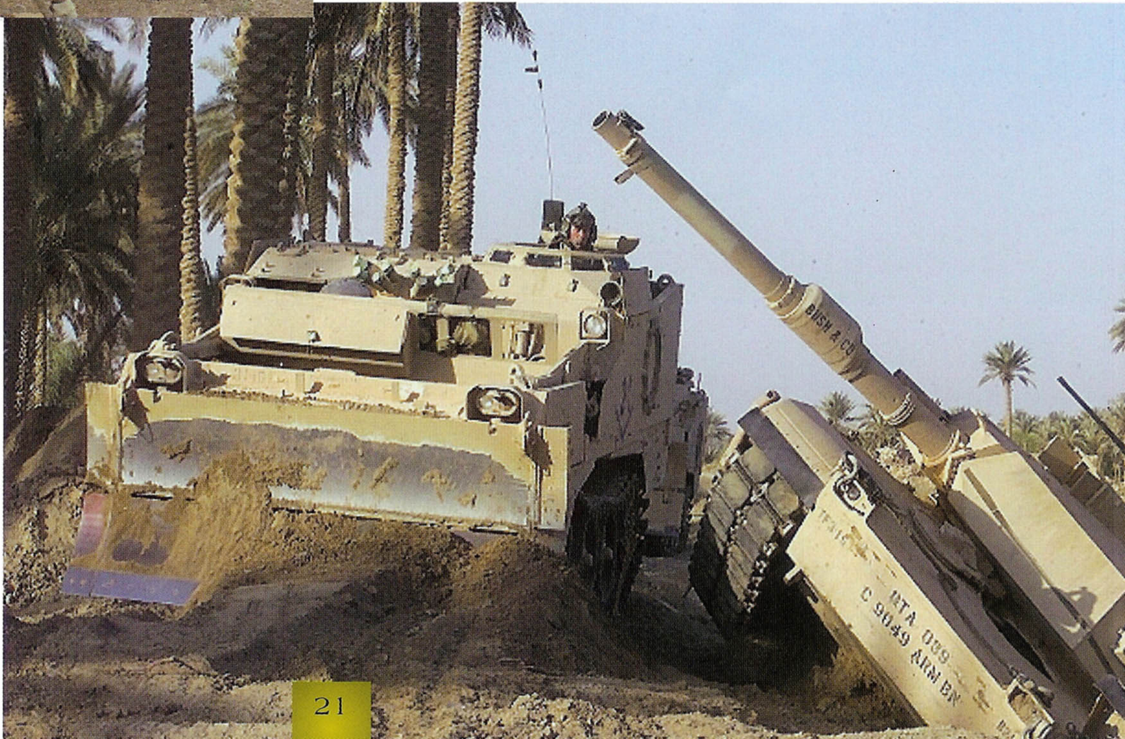
This Abrams from the 3rd Brigade sports an orange air identification panel on the rear of the turret top. This unit did not place the company chevron on the turret CIP. A black barrel-shaped sleeping bag can be seen hanging off the right rear of the turret. The smoke dischargers have been armed as well, ready for action. (Busack)



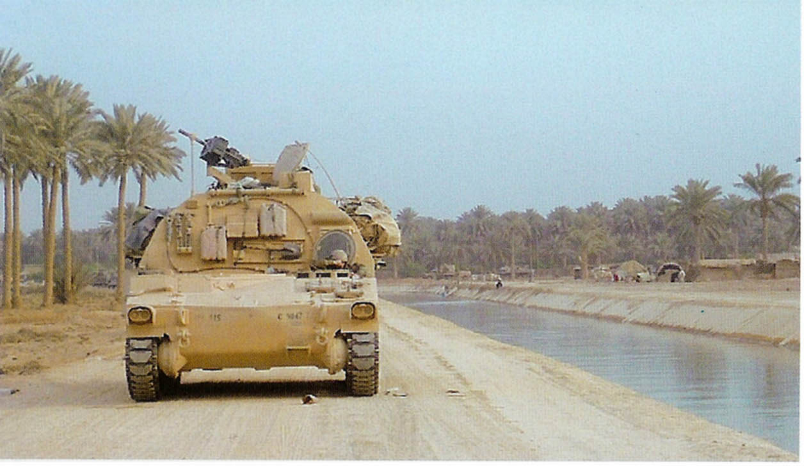


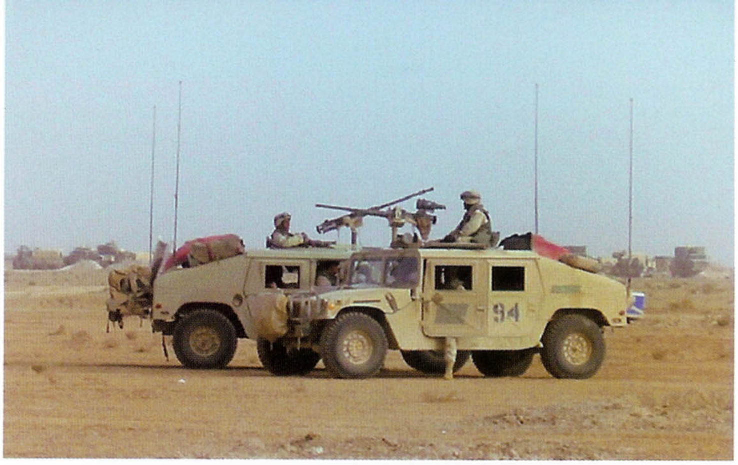
An M88 tracked recovery vehicle follows an Abrams mine plow tank as the 3rd Brigade advances north towards Baghdad. The 3rd Brigade would eventually make its way to the northwest of the capital to prevent reinforcements from reaching Baghdad. Other Iraqi forces already in the area vigorously counterattacked the 3rd Brigade, resulting in intense fighting just northwest of Baghdad. (Busack)

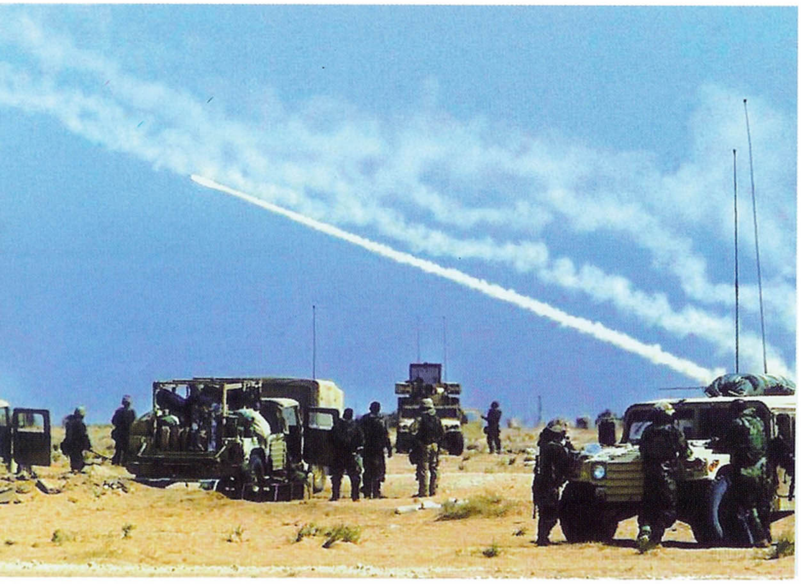
Infantry push in a door while looking for the enemy in Hindiya. The 3rd ID wanted to use the Karbala Gap as a route to Baghdad, but the Iraqis were also aware of its natural attractiveness as an avenue, so it was suspected of being a kill box. The 3rd ID along with the 101st and 82nd Airborne, therefore conducted a series of simultaneous attacks oriented toward the east of Karbala, including Hindiya, which was designed to force the Iraqis to reposition their artillery. Air assets were then able to target the moving enemy units and take them out of the fight. As a result, with the 3rd Brigade in the lead, the 3rd ID attacked successfully through the Karbala Gap meeting lighter resistance.

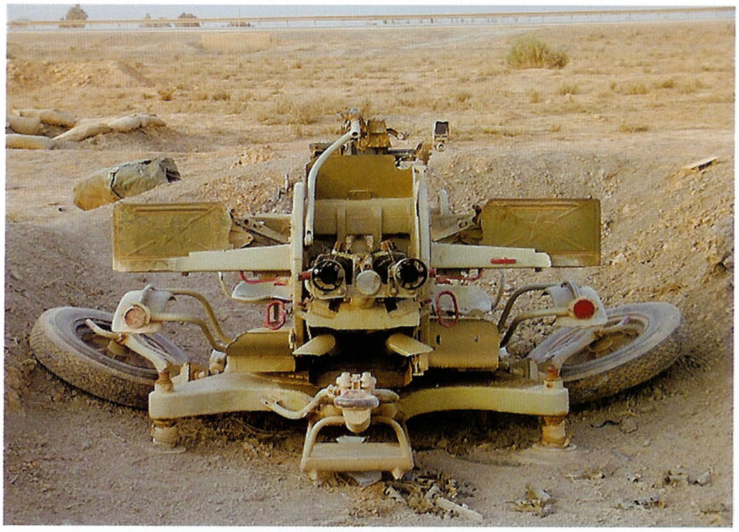


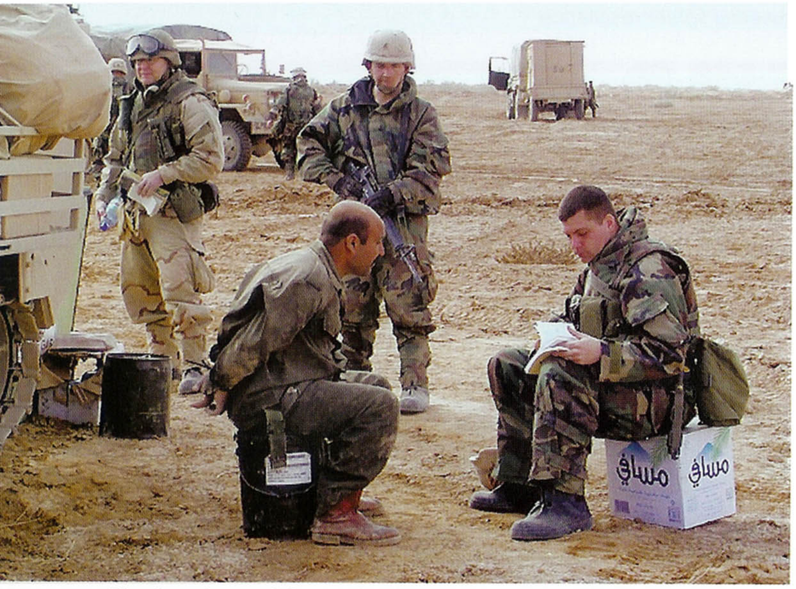
"BUSH & CO" was lucky. Here an M9 Ace armored combat earthmover repairs the road in preparations to recover the tank. Other vehicles that traveled along canal roads were not so lucky. Numerous incidents occurred in the darkness when vehicles tumbled into a canal or other bodies of water, and several soldiers drowned, including an embedded journalist.


An M992 Field Artillery Ammunition Supply Vehicle (FAASV) rumbles down a canal road. It is designed to keep pace with and supply the M109 howitzers. It is capable of carrying a 12,000 lb payload. A .50-cal machine gun is normally part of the vehicle's defense.


Scouts halt to confer with each other. The HMMWV on the right has mounted a high powered scope on its .50-cal MG. Both vehicles carry their air identification panels on the back side of the vehicle, as opposed to the rooftop, so as not to compromise any potential camouflage advantages.


Soldiers from divisional artillery watch as MLRS missiles head toward their targets. (Quintiliani)

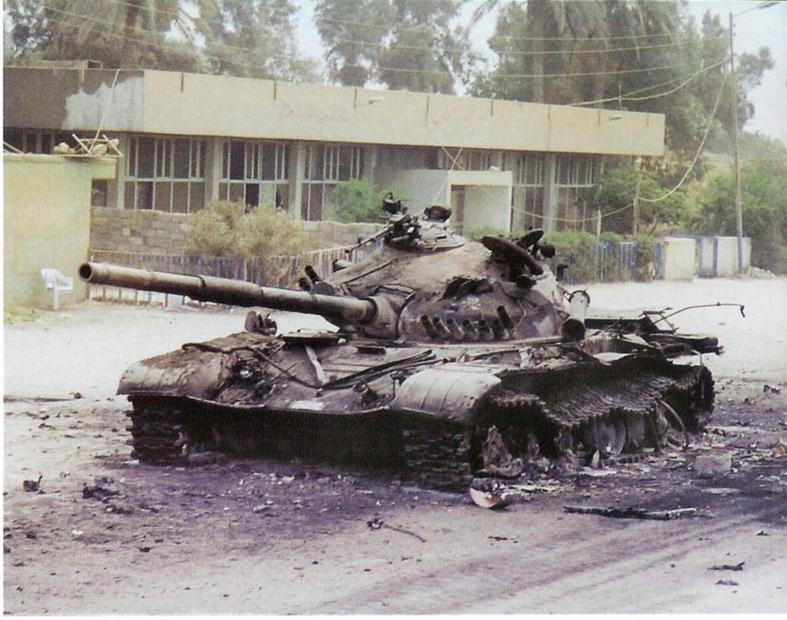

A towed ZU-23 AA gun captured during the march north. These guns were quite versatile as they could be used against low flying aircraft as well as ground targets. As a result they were normally a high priority target for the US aircraft in support of ground operations.



The American soldier on the right uses a case of locally manufactured water bottles as a seat while he interrogates an EPW (Enemy Prisoner of War). Many Iraqis merely shed their uniforms and changed into civilian clothes and began walking home from the battlefield. This created problems for the US forces as it was feared many of these men were actually attempting to melt through US lines to regroup elsewhere in the rear.

This enemy soldier was killed along with others when they tried to use an ambulance as transport to move around the battlefield. It was a common practice of Iraqi forces to make use of vehicles such as ambulances, and buildings such as schools and hospitals, so that coalition forces would refrain from attacking them.

An engineer unit bypasses the destroyed Iraqi ambulance used to ferry enemy troops. The tactics used by the enemy resulted in numerous mistakes by the US forces when innocent civilian vehicles approached US troops, causing innocent civilian casualties.

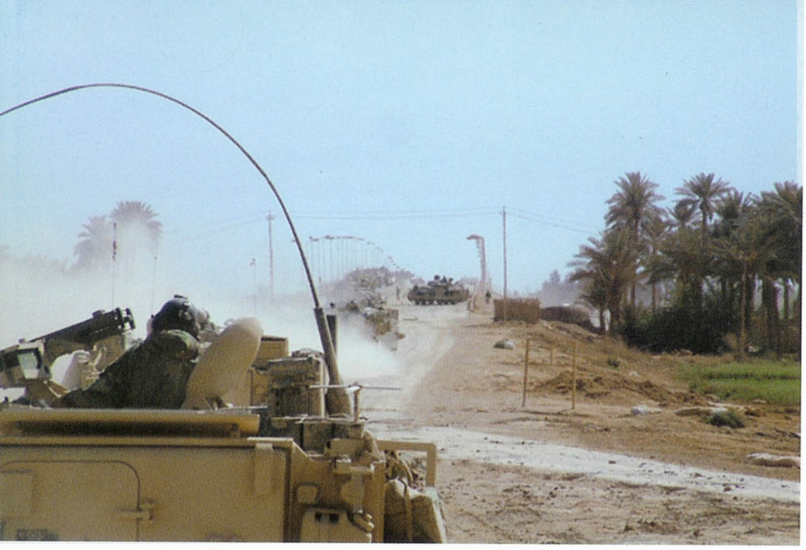


It was common for the T-72 tanks employed by the Iraqis to suffer catastrophic explosions after a penetration, since the ammunition was not stored separately from the rest of the fighting compartment. It was common for burned out tanks to sink to the ground as a result of the suspension being completely consumed by the intense fires.

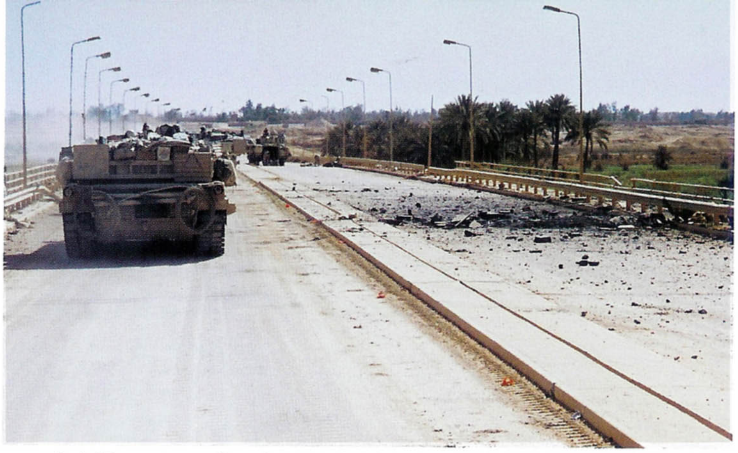
As the 3rd ID attacked out of Karbala towards Objective Peach (the designated crossing point of the Euphrates) an enemy ambush was discovered along a road. This photo shows dismounted US infantry securing the EPWs, who were hiding in the bushes along the road. An infantryman with an M203 grenade launcher is seen closest to the camera. He also has a specially designed vest which carries the grenades for the launcher.

An M1064A3 mortar carrier fires in support of attacks near Objective Peach. The M1064A3 is a converted M113 with a reinforced floor to take the impact of firing the 120mm mortar, which is designed to fire through the large hatch at the rear of the vehicle.

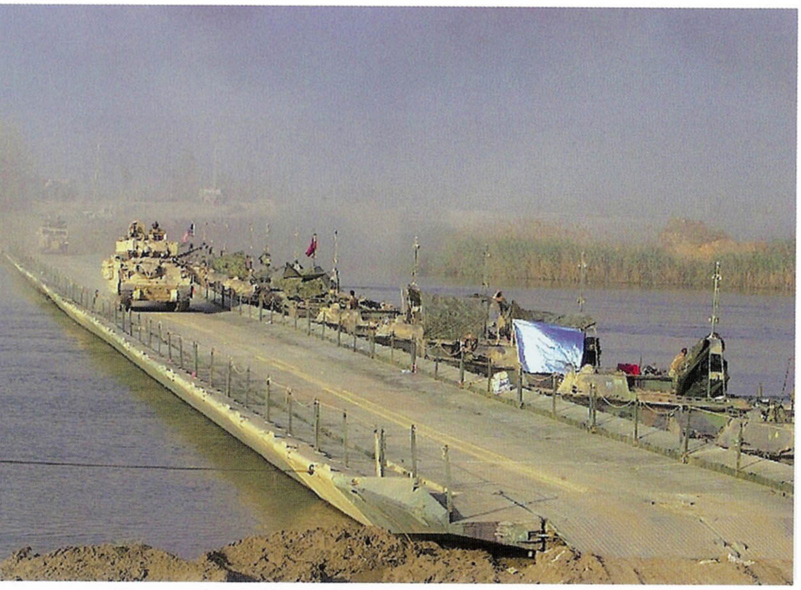
An Avenger sits in the foreground as MLRS missiles are fired at enemy targets around Baghdad. (Quintiliani)



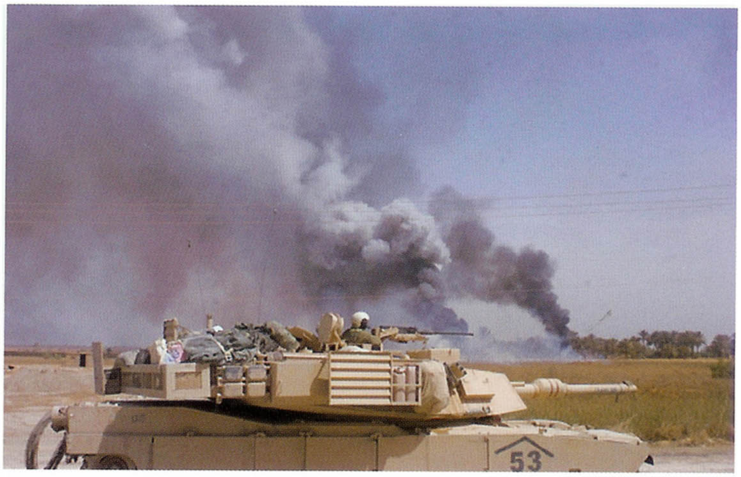
3rd ID vehicles press across the bridge at Objective Peach, southwest of Baghdad on 2 April. Although many enemy positions were well placed, most were abandoned as the division approached Objective Peach.



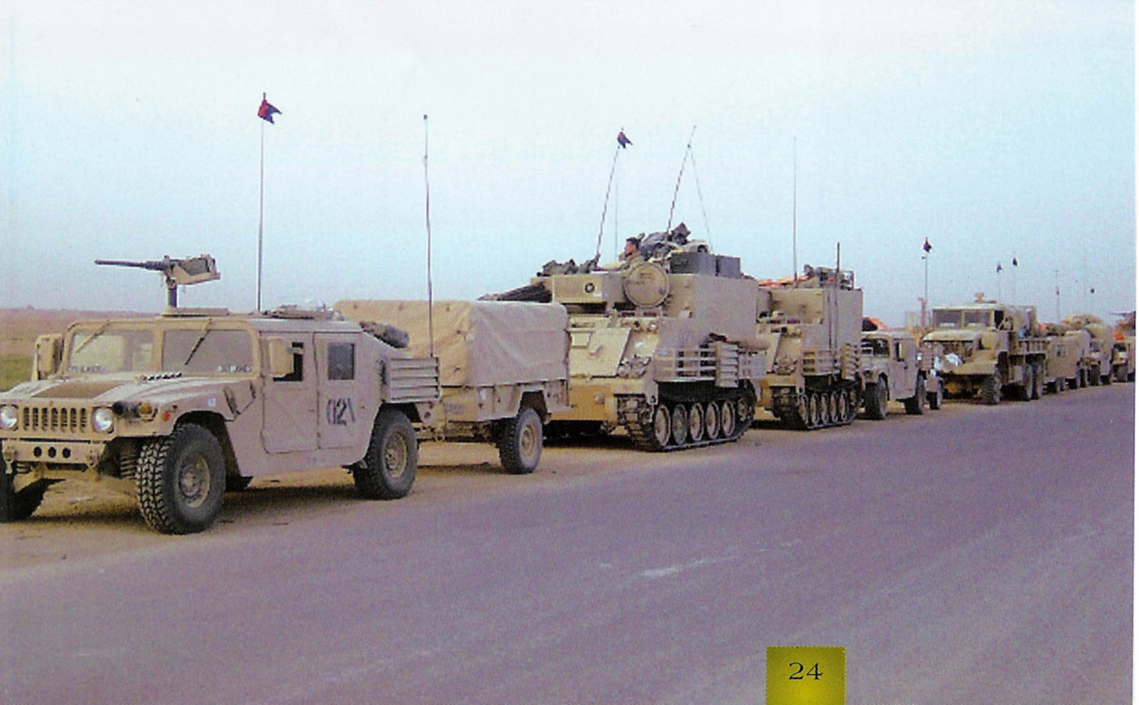
3rd ID crosses the damaged bridge at Objective Peach. The Iraqis attempted to blow the bridge, but were unsuccessful. The 3rd ID knew the bridge would be wired for demolition and so artillery fire was called on the likely locations of Iraqi engineers. The engineers of A/11 EN BN identified wires on the bridge and conducted a river assault in inflatable boats. Before they could clear the bridge the Iraqis fired their explosives. One span was damaged, but a second span remained passable.



The pontoon bridge built at Objective Peach. The division had realized the damaged main bridge would become a bottleneck, so the pontoon bridge was erected. This helped the 3rd ID attack towards Baghdad International Airport sooner.

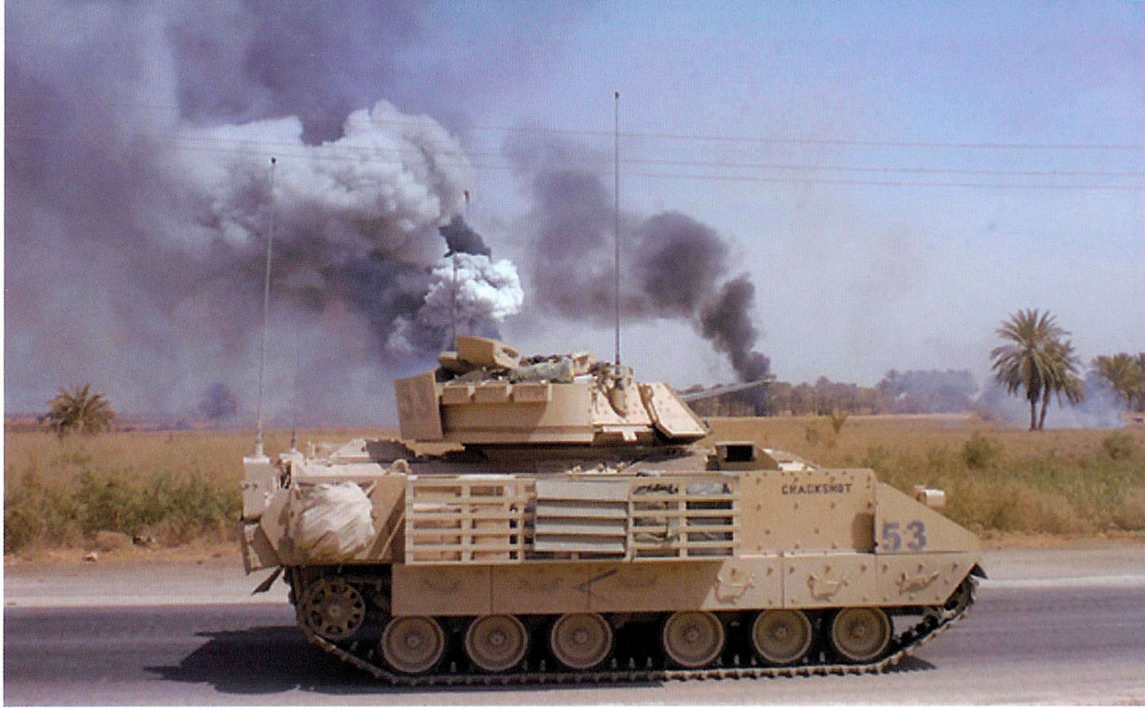


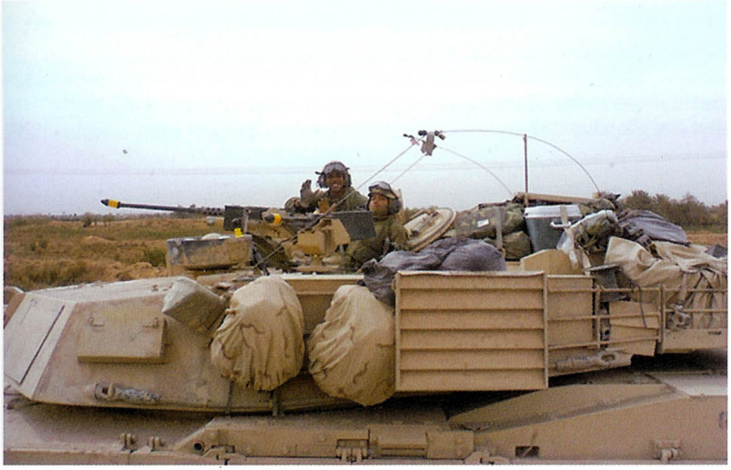
A good profile view of Red 2. The colored bands around the bore evacuator indicate the platoon and vehicle number, in this case 1st Platoon, 2nd Vehicle. Red stood for the 1st Platoon, white for the 2nd, and blue for the 3rd. The number of bands stood for the vehicle number. There were four tanks to a platoon. Number one was the platoon leader, two was his wingman (as in this photo), three was the wingman for number four, and four was the platoon sergeant.



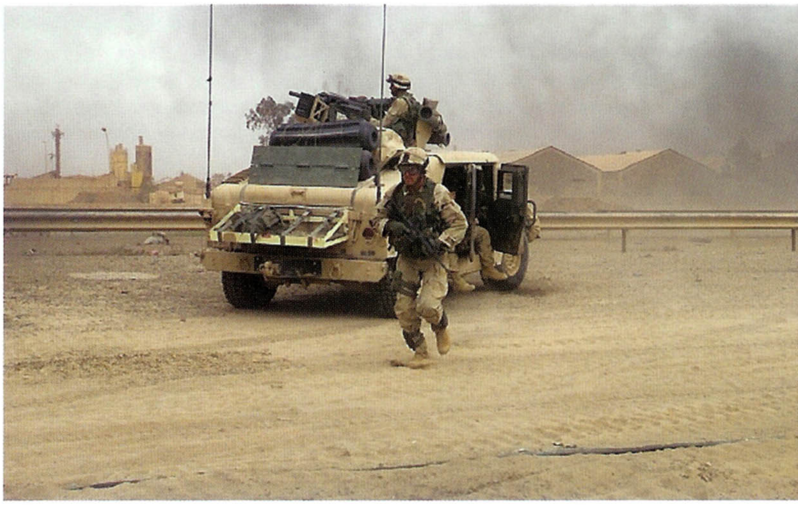
An HQ unit pauses as the noose around Baghdad tightens. The "\" behind the number "02" on the lead HMMWV indicates these are divisional asset vehicles. The second M577 has a folded QUEAMS antenna. When unfolded this antenna pivots upwards and telescopes to a height of 30 feet. In this photo there appears to be a storage rack on the roof of the vehicle.

A moment later a Bradley from blue platoon goes by the same spot. This vehicle was nicknamed "CRACKSHOT". The "3" indicates this M2A2 is a Charlie Company vehicle.



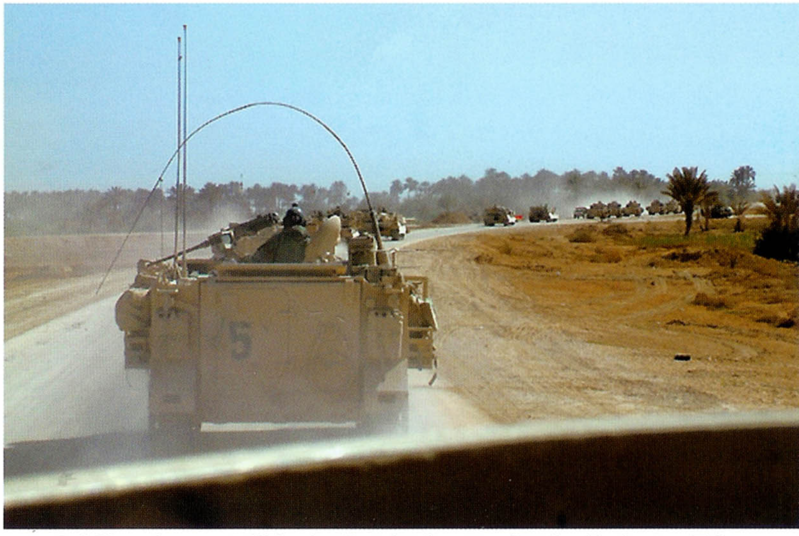


A side view of an Abrams nearing Baghdad. In this case the crew has placed sabot protective cones over both machine gun barrels. It does not appear the bustle rack APU (Auxiliary Power Unit) is on board. Many M1A1s did not have the APU in OIF.

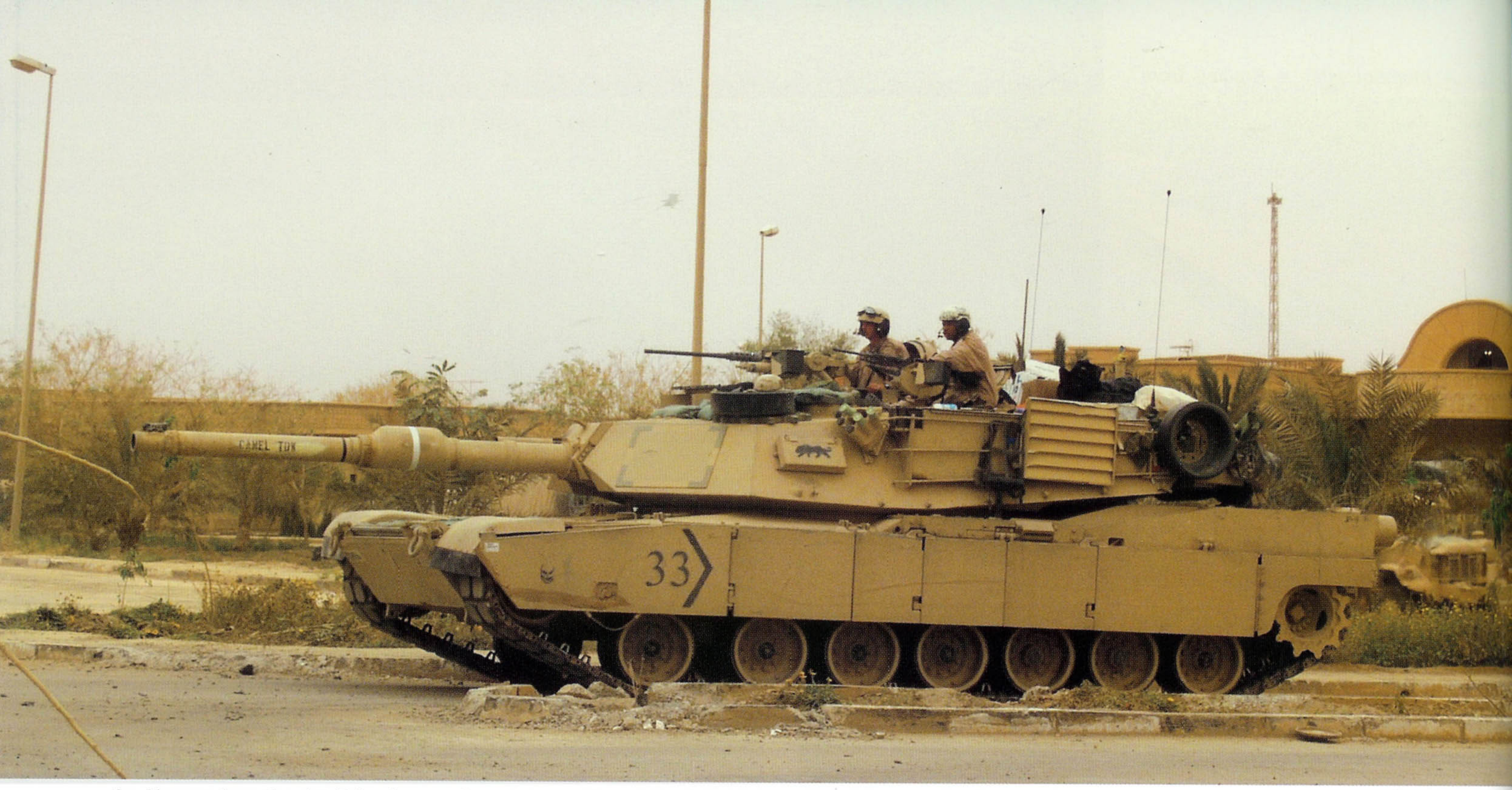


A Mk-19 grenade launcher is manned while the rest of the men of this HMMWV dismount to attack enemy strongpoints. Two Javelin antitank weapons are carried on the back roof of the HMMWV. They appear to still be in their storage containers. Strapped to the rear of the gunner's hatch is an AT-4 antitank recoilless rifle.

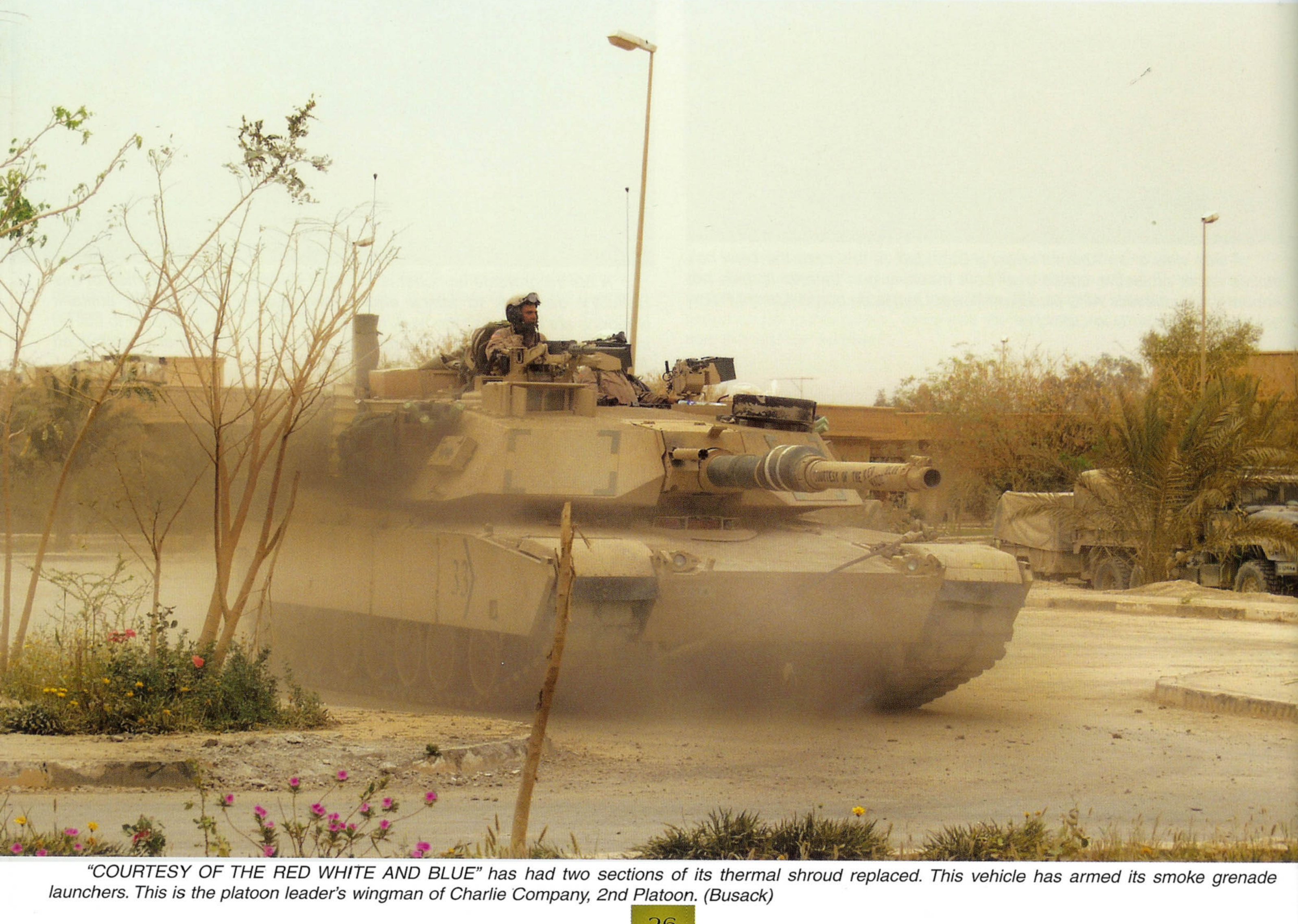
Infantrymen stay on the alert as they search an area that was recently occupied by enemy troops. At this point in the war many of the men were out of their MOPP suits as the division had crossed the "Red Line," which was the point many felt chemical weapons would be used as a last ditch effort.



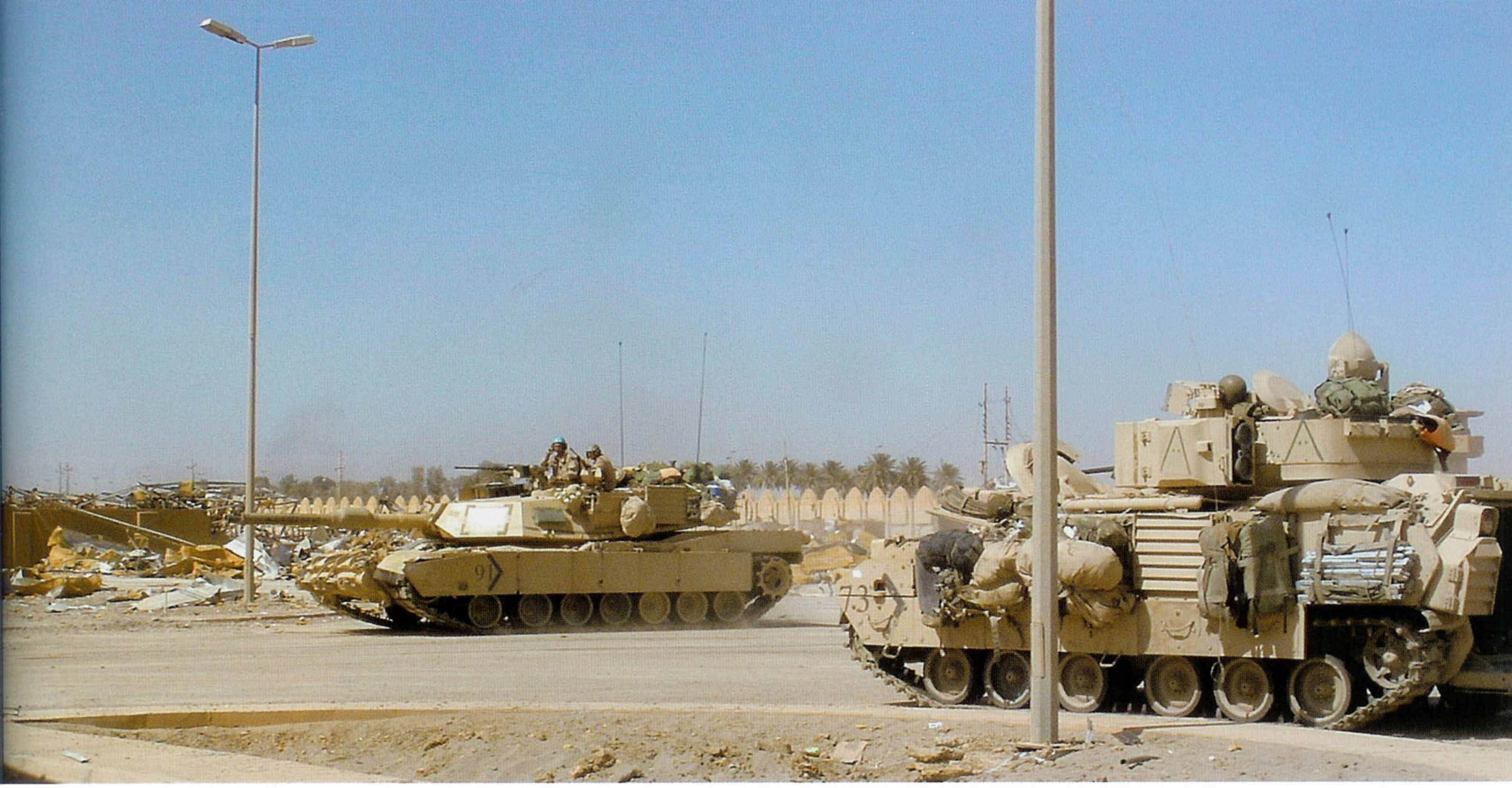
3rd ID pushes past Objective Peach after crossing the Euphrates. This M113 does not have an ACAV kit attached. Since there are no external fuel tanks attached, this vehicle can be identified as an M113A2. A3s are to be distinguished by their external fuel tanks on the rear of the hull.



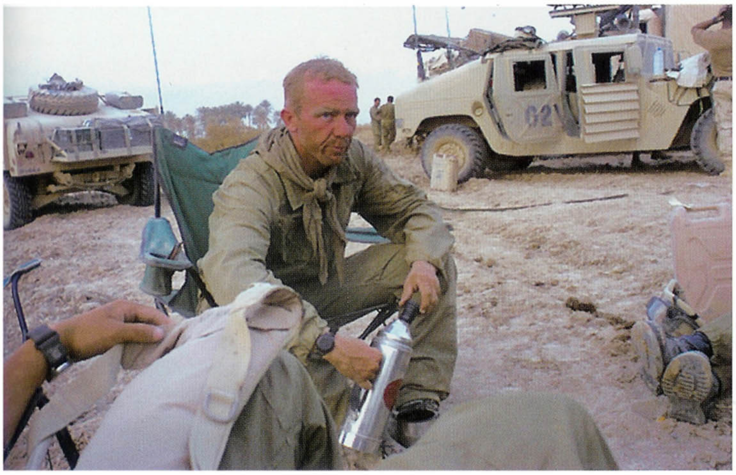
An Abrams from the 1st Brigade guards an intersection at Baghdad International Airport after it was taken on 4 April. A shipping label is still evident on the front of the side skirt. This was rather common for many Abrams throughout the 3rd ID. (Busack)



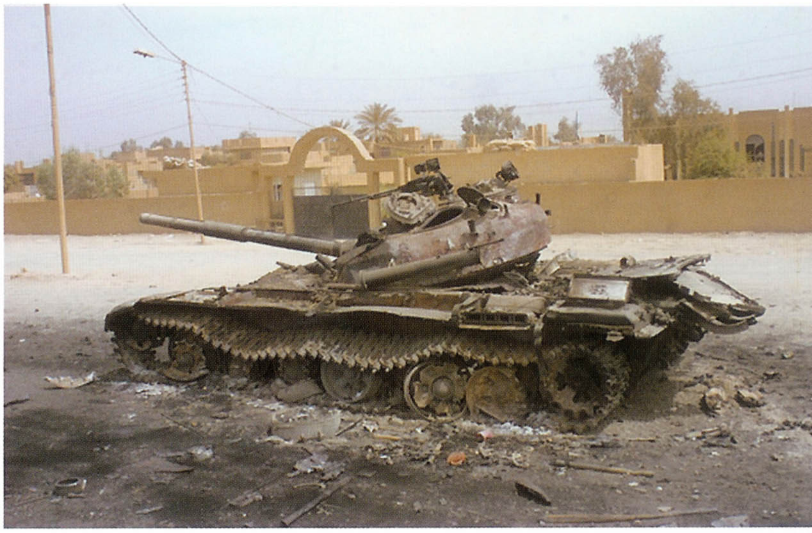
"COURTESY OF THE RED WHITE AND BLUE" has had two sections of its thermal shroud replaced. This vehicle has armed its smoke grenade launchers. This is the platoon leader's wingman of Charlie Company, 2nd Platoon. (Busack)



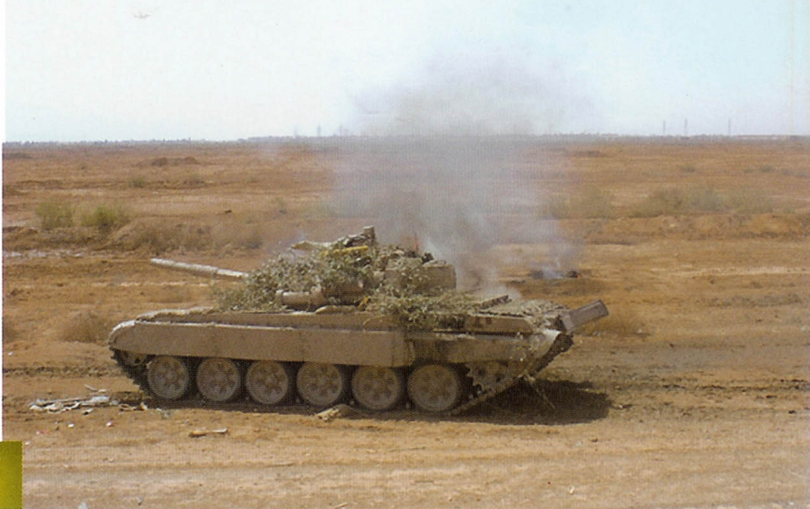
3rd Brigade vehicles secure a roundabout as they attack to the northwest of Baghdad. Cots are folded up and stowed on the left rear side of the Bradley. Both vehicles have brightly colored air identification panels on the top of their turrets. (Busack)



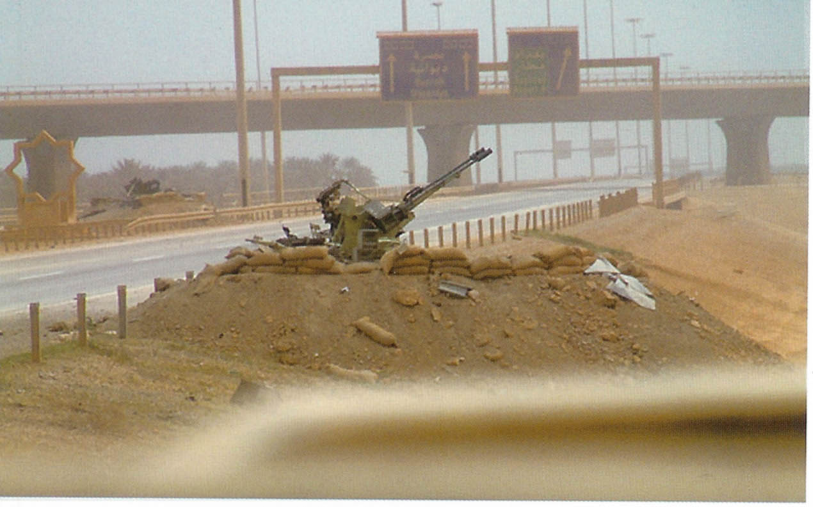
Exhaustion shows on the face of the 1-64 Alpha Co commander, Captain Hilmes. He is taking a break with fellow tankers of Alpha Co. At this point most tankers were only wearing their Nomex suits with either the small tanker's flak vest overtop, or IBA overtop. Nomex tanker suits are very similar to the Nomex flight suits worn by aircrews.



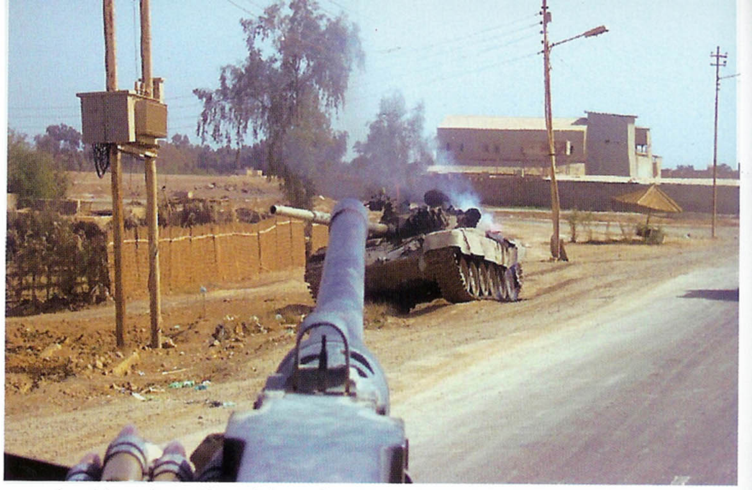
A Republican Guard T-72 lies destroyed on the side of the road. It is likely this vehicle was destroyed at least a day before as the fire has long died out. Many Iraqi tanks were destroyed by air assets as the Iraqis tried to reposition their forces in response to unexpected 3rd ID moves.



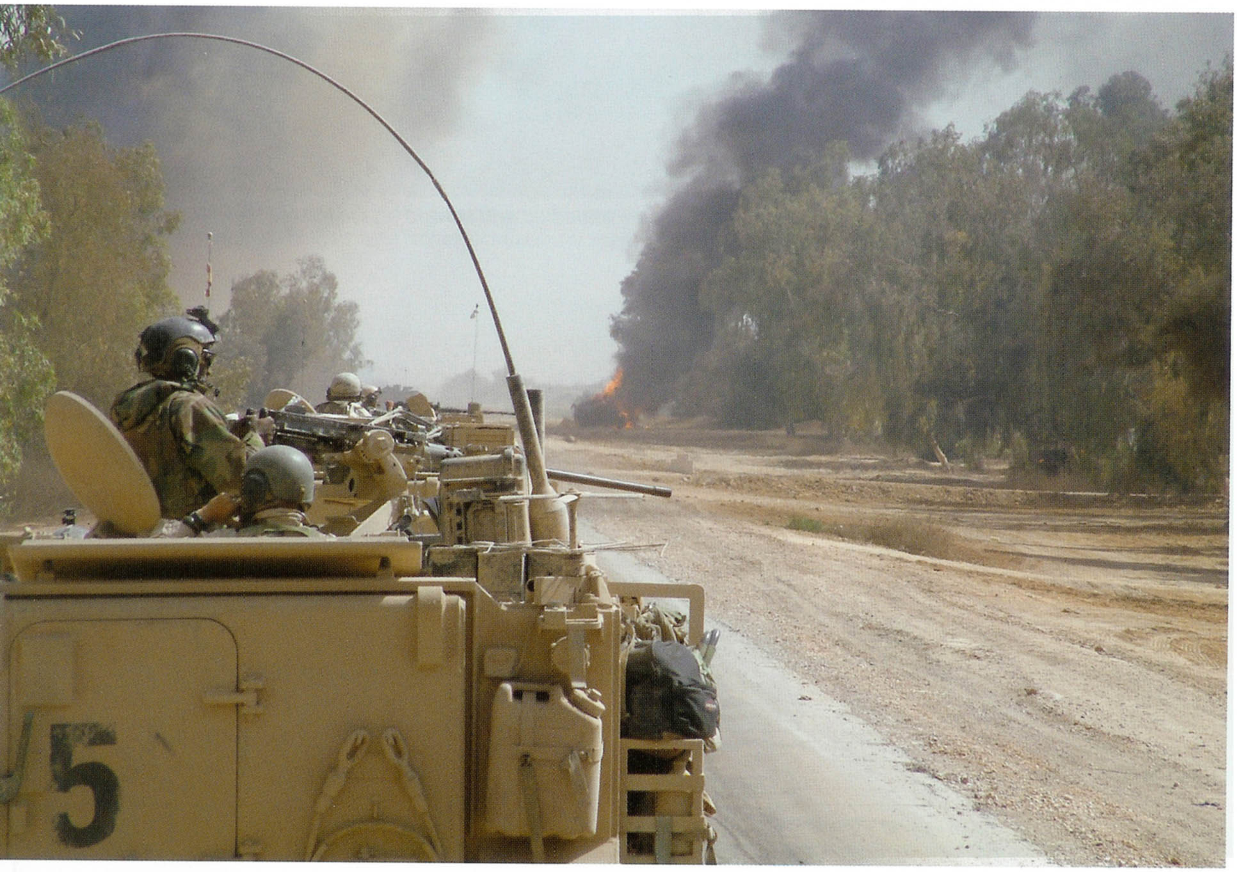
Many Iraqi vehicles were well camouflaged and were difficult for aircraft to identify. However, the thermal sights on US vehicles had little problem finding the Iraqi tanks. This T-72 was simply abandoned when its unit was surprised by the fast moving 3rd ID.



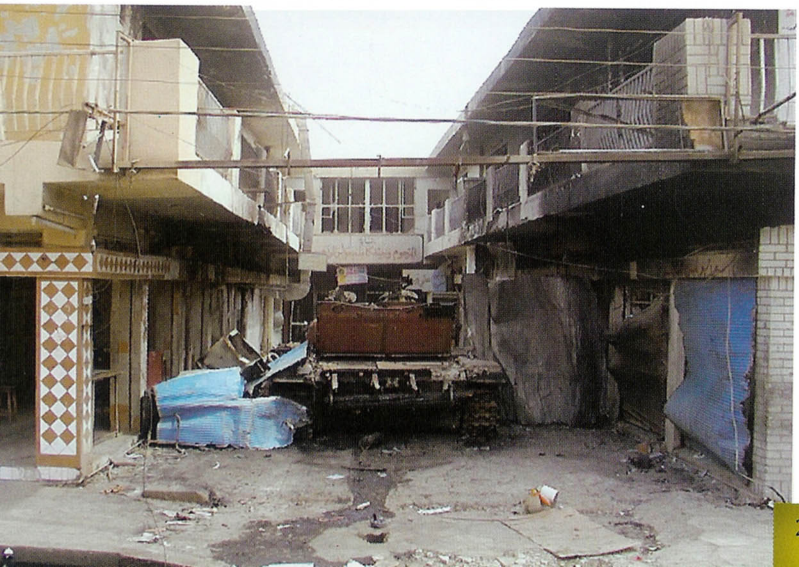
An abandoned antiaircraft position on the road to Objective Saints. The gun is a Soviet made ZU-23-2 which were a real danger to coalition helicopters and A10 aircraft, and thus were priority targets. They could also be used effectively against ground targets.



Looking down the sights of a .50-cal at a burning T-72 of the Medina Division. Although the regular Iraqi Army units were intended to be bypassed in southern Iraq, there was no intention of bypassing Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard units. Due to their loyalty to Saddam, they needed to be destroyed.



A convoy of vehicles warily passes by a burning Iraqi vehicle. In the foreground is an M113 APC. On 4 April the 2nd Brigade was tasked with attacking southward to roll up the Medina Division, which was still oriented towards the south, and thus would not be in a position to meet the 2nd Brigade's attack. The Medina camouflaged its vehicles fairly well, but they had to be dispersed to avoid air attacks. This added to the effectiveness of the 2nd Brigade's attack and practically every Iraqi tank crew abandoned their tanks as the 2nd Brigade attacked them from behind.



Here, a T-72 of the Medina Division was not even properly oriented toward the street as it attempted to avoid air detection by hastily hiding between buildings. Amazingly, others have criticized the 3rd ID saying they should not have destroyed these vehicles since their destruction endangered civilians. It is beyond comprehension that any army would leave intact fighting vehicles in its rear, ready for enemy personnel to remount them. The fighting in southern Iraq clearly showed what unmolested units in the rear could do.

The 2nd Brigade attacked down Highways 8 and 1 from the north. Here armor searches for targets as it attacks the Medina Division from behind, while smoke billows near the side of the road.

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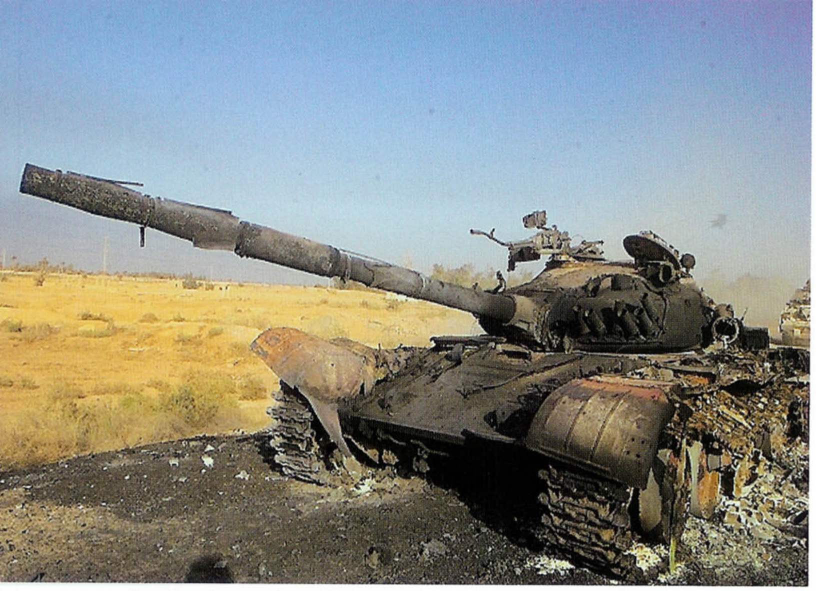
Another Medina Division tank parked between buildings burns as the 2nd Brigade attacks through this Iraqi unit. This view shows the rear of the Iraqi T-72 tank. The Medina Division had every intention of putting up a fight before it was outmaneuvered by the 3rd ID.

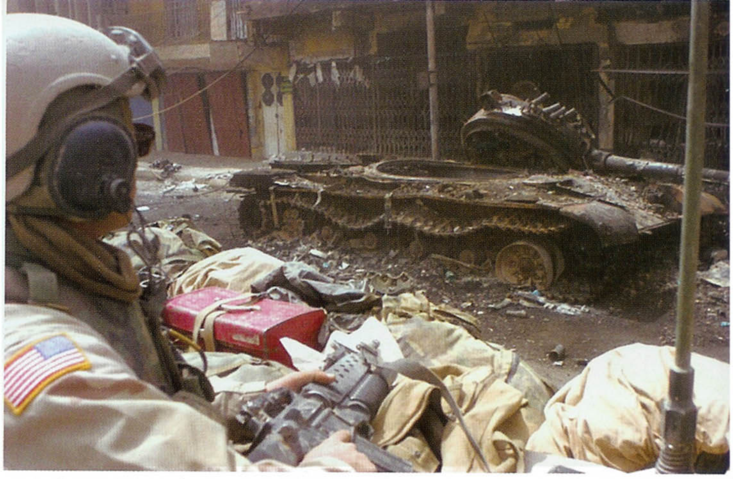
Another fiercely burning T-72 litters the roadside. Many Iraqi tanks were covered with a camouflage of palm leaves in attempts to hide them in palm groves. But when they moved the Iraqi tanks became even more vulnerable, such as when this tank was caught out in the open.

A view from the TC's hatch on an M1A1. In the right foreground is a GPS device. Most TCs kept them handy by attaching them to the .50-cal mount. When tanks of 1-64 entered Mahmudiya they surprised and destroyed seven T-72s, four BMPs and several other vehicles. Here, one of those T-72s burns in the middle of the street.

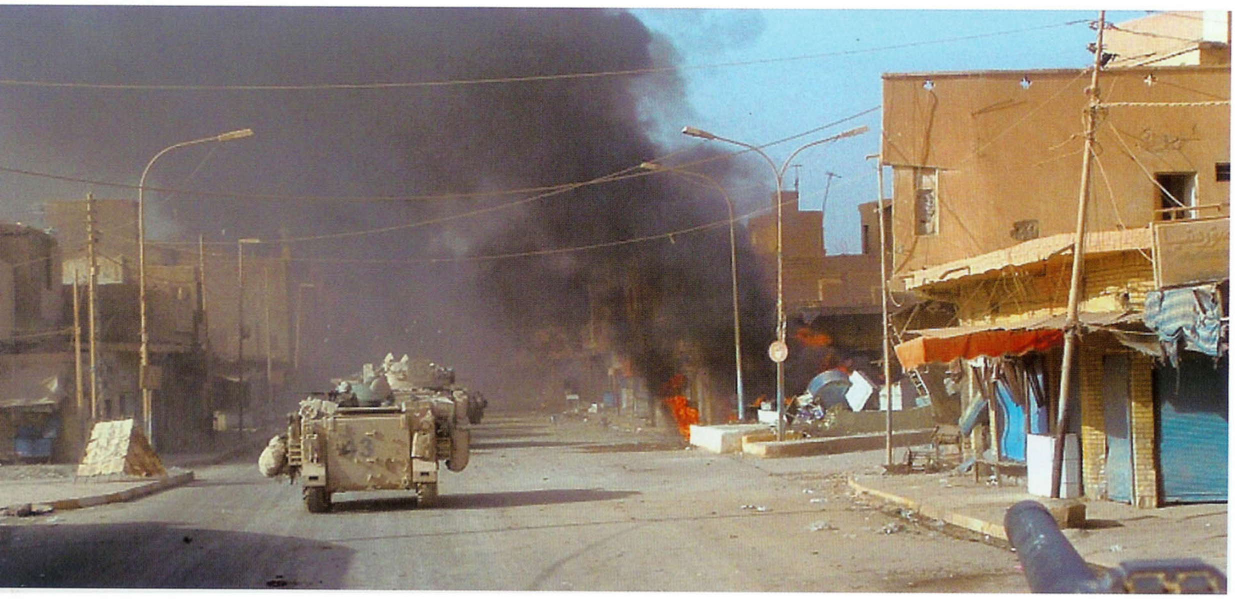
Most T-72s were abandoned as the 2nd Brigade drew near. This tank has been completely consumed by fire, and its turret lies helplessly beside it. However, there were several incidents where concealed BMPs got off shots and were able to hit 3rd ID tanks. But, in every incident no real damage was sustained by the US tanks and all enemy armor was destroyed for their efforts.



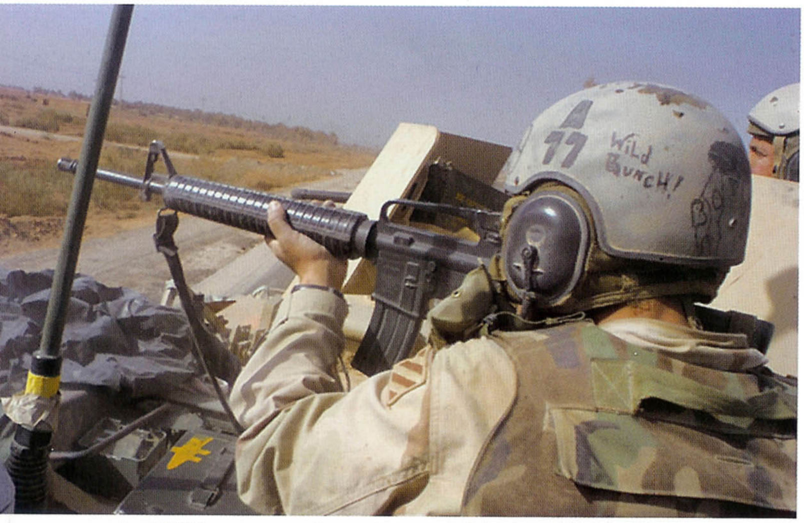
Another burned out T-72 on the side of the road as the 2nd Brigade attack passes through. The Iraqi's 10th Armored Brigade of the Medina Division counterattacked at Objective Peach with T-72s and M113s that had originally been captured during the Iran-Iraq War. The 10th Armored never got off a clean shot and with assistance from Apache helicopters, 18 T-72s and 30 M113s were destroyed.



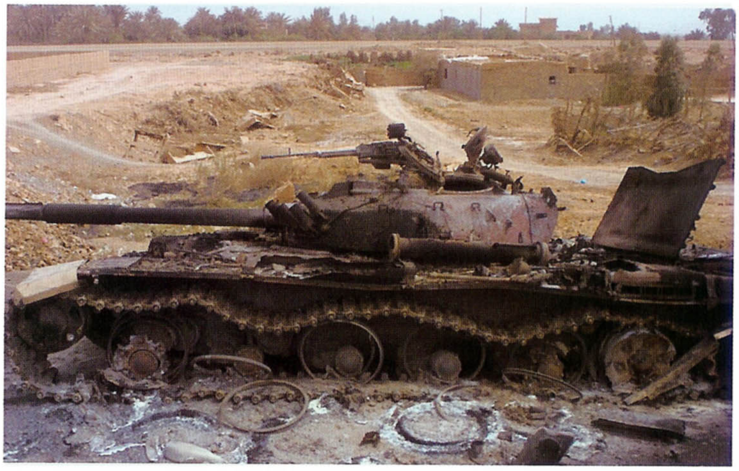
A crewman from an M113 looks on as his vehicle passes the same destroyed T-72 depicted in an earlier photo. This tank was likely destroyed by air assets before the 2nd Brigade's attack. In this example the road wheels have completely melted away.



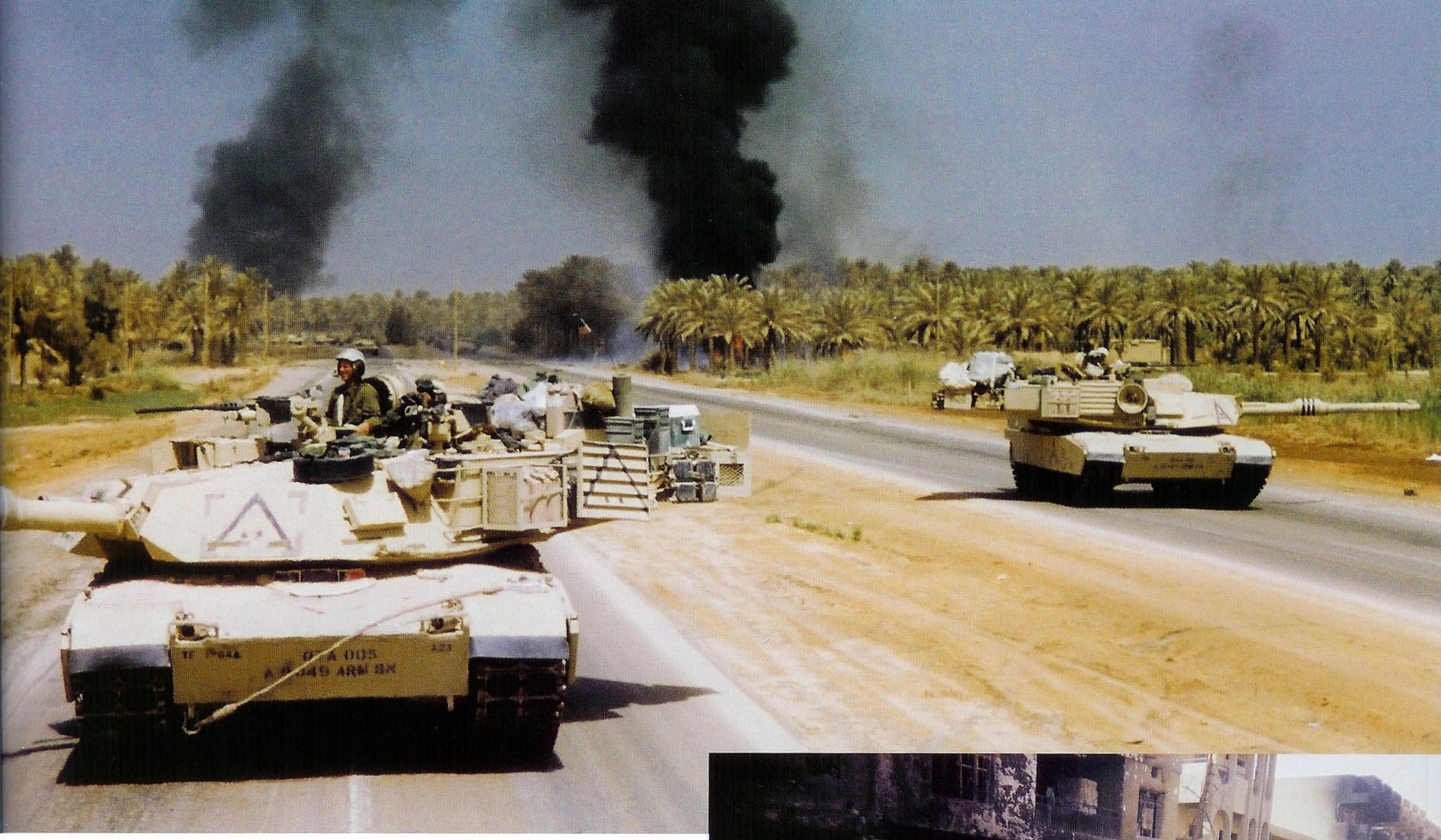
An M113 loaded down with gear is led by a Bradley through a small town. The attack was so swift that the enemy did not have a chance to even set up defensive positions in likely places such as buildings. These would have provided ideal places from which to launch anti-tank weapons in these built-up areas.



An M113 crewman fires at enemy infantry with his M16 assault rifle during the fight against the Medina Division. He has adorned his CVC with graffiti, including the nickname of his company (A Company). This M113 has an ACAV kit for the TC which is painted in a sand color, a somewhat rare occurrence.

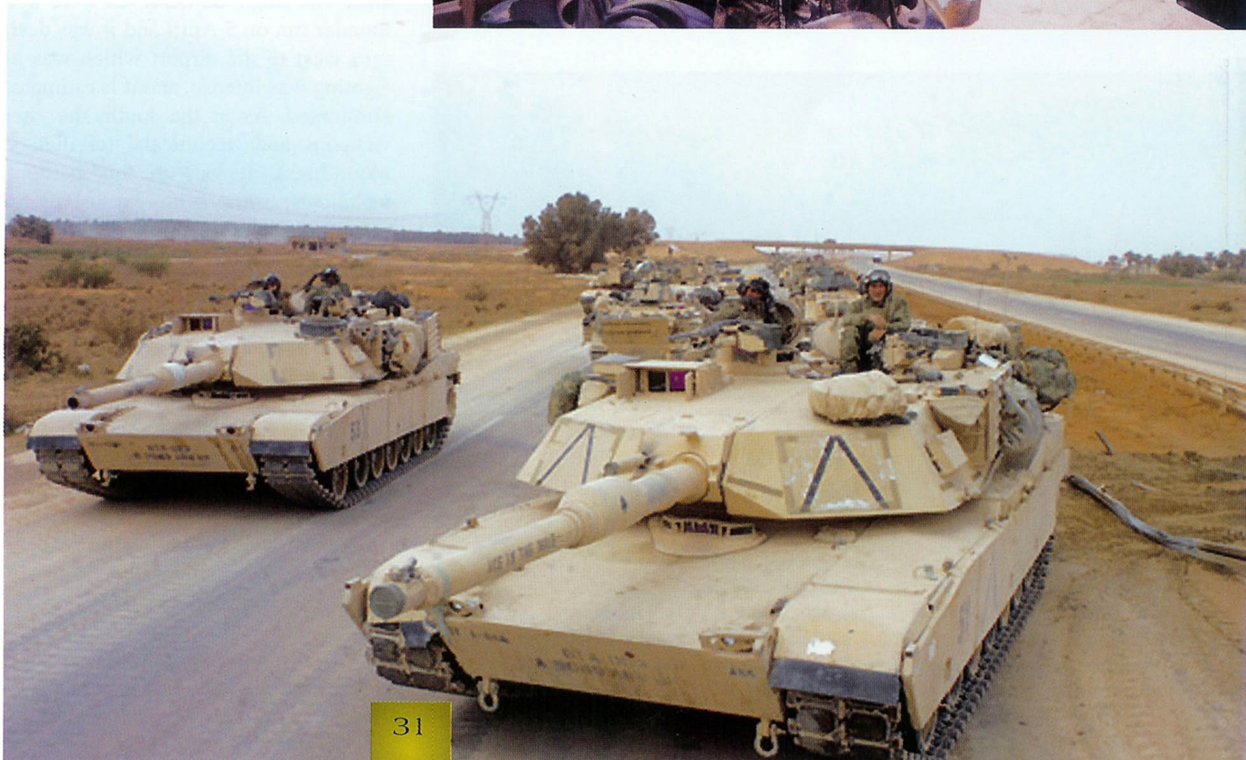


Yet another T-72 destroyed by US forces. It was rumored that the Iraqis acquired some T-80 tanks, which caused some consternation with the troops. But that rumor proved false. Even if the Iraqis had T-80s, it is unlikely they would have made any difference. Clearly, the Iraqis were not as well trained as the Americans. The Iraqis were not only outgunned when it came to technology, but they were outfought both strategically and tactically and so were never able to effectively respond to American moves.

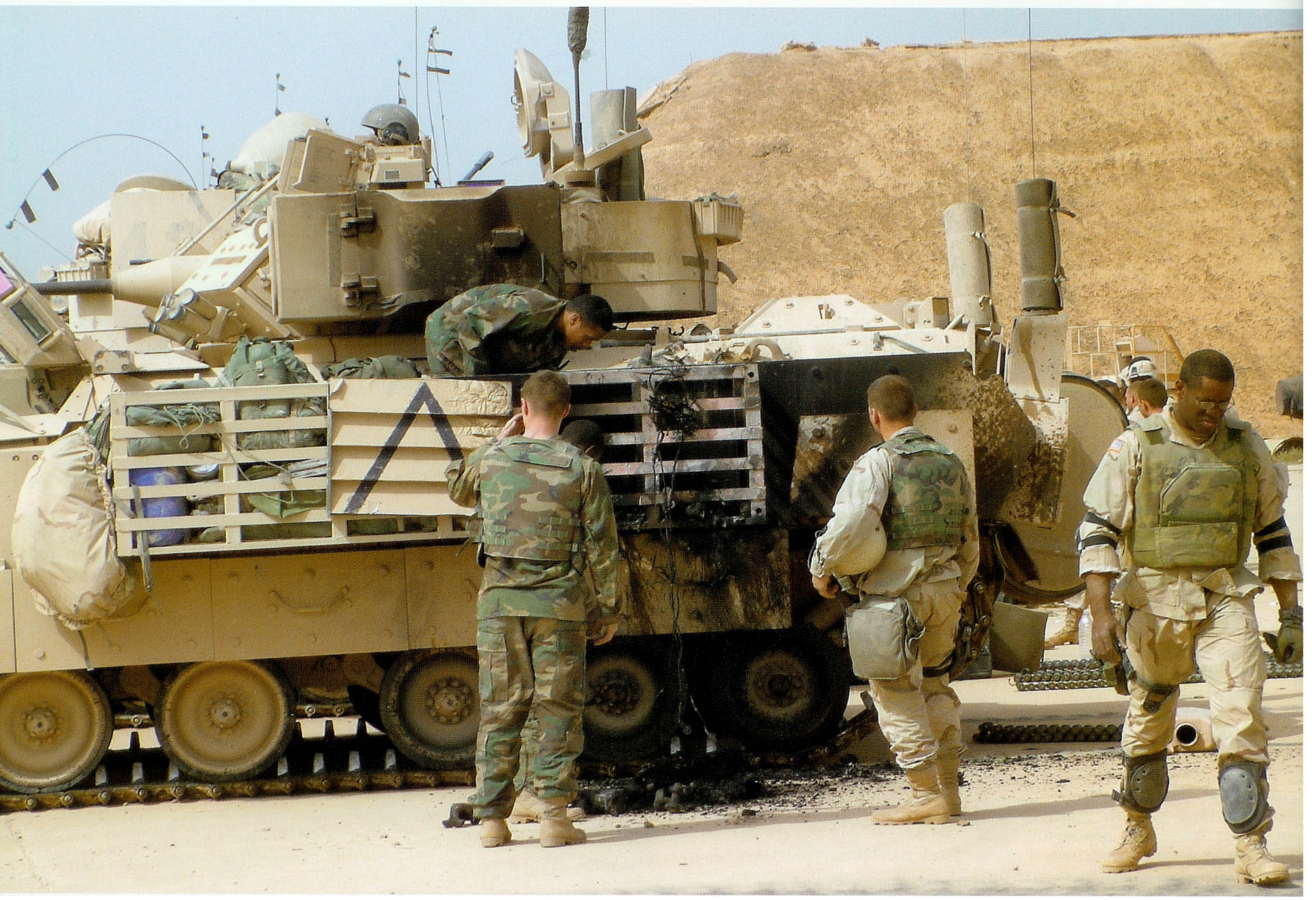


Once crews had used their tow cables, they tended to mount them on the hulls instead of remounting them on the turret. Tow cables were always attached in the manner shown here. Crews stored the second tow cable on the rear hull in the opposite direction, so when needing to back up to another tank, both cables (one from each tank) could be readily employed for towing purposes.

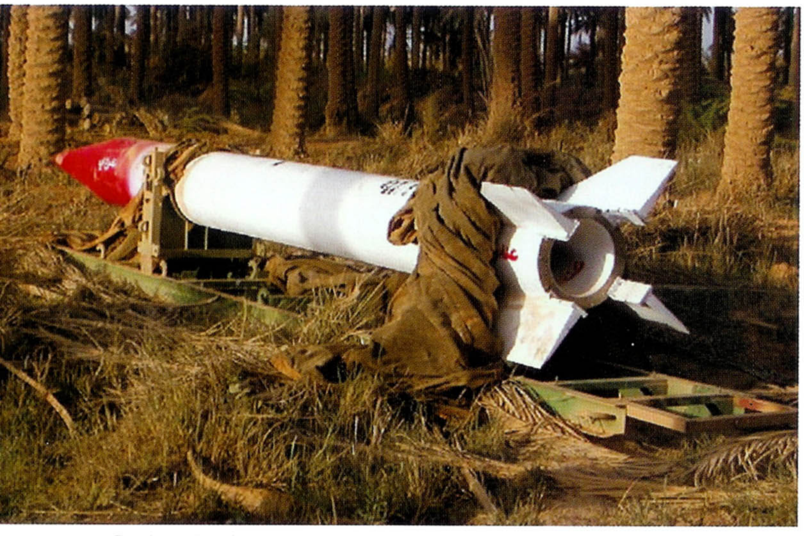
Even in the fight against the Medina Division, crews still did not arm their smoke grenade launchers. A spare roadwheel is covered here since it was used to store handy items such as toilet paper. Despite their town being damaged by fires from the burning tanks, Iraqi civilians still manage to wave hello to the advancing Americans.



Members of 2nd Brigade stop for a moment after attacking the Medina Division. "ACE IN THE HOLE" is still adorned with Velcro tape which held on MILES training gear used in pre-war maneuvers.



Soldiers examine a Bradley that was struck by an RPG. The RPG struck the crew's packs and set them on fire, but the armor was not penetrated. Many M1A1 tanks sustained similar damage, and the melting gear dripped into the engine deck grilles, causing further problems for some tanks.



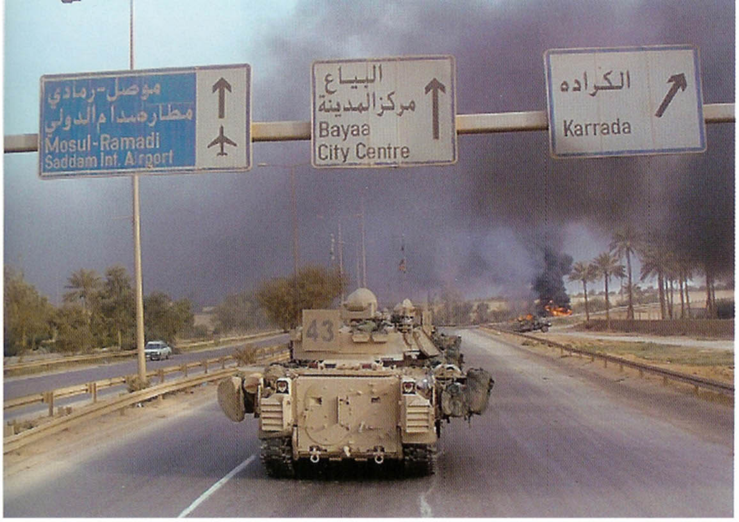
During the first thunder run attack on 5 April, numerous ground-to-ground missiles were found camouflaged in palm groves. These missile units remained a real danger as would be proven two days later. This missile is a scaled down Iraqi copy of the Scud, known as the Al-Samoud missile.

The 2nd Brigade commander, Colonel David Perkins, decided that a thunder run (recon by fire) would be an appropriate tactic at this point, since the Baghdad defenses were not known. 1-64 was tasked with the thunder run on 5 April and it was designed to run up Highway 8 and then turn west to the airport which was already in 1st Brigade's hands. The fighting was intense, and it is estimated that over 1,000 of the enemy were eliminated. As in the south, the enemy generally fought with infantry weapons and 'technicals' (civilian vehicles with improvised weapons mountings). It was in this battle that news video footage showed technicals, some with explosives aboard, futilely attacking tanks by attempting to ram them.

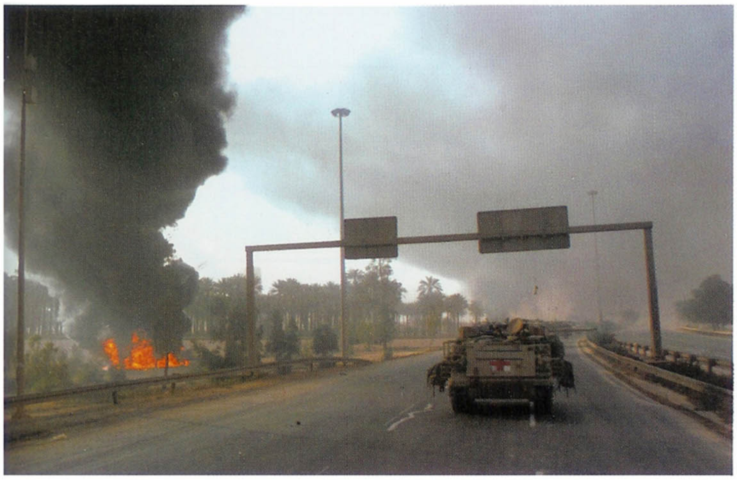
One tank ("CAJONE EH") was knocked out on the highway with an RPG to the rear, and after a half hour of trying to stop the flames, the vehicle was abandoned, but not before thermite grenades were thrown inside, and a follow-on M1A1 put a round into it. Later, air assets hit it with a Maverick missile as well. There were no casualties as a result of "CAJONE EH" being knocked out.

1-64 did sustain four wounded and one tank commander killed in action when he was struck by machine gun fire while engaging enemy dismounts with his M4 carbine. In anticipation of close-in urban fighting most crews armed themselves with M4s and AT-4s, which were kept handy on the turret roofs of the tanks.

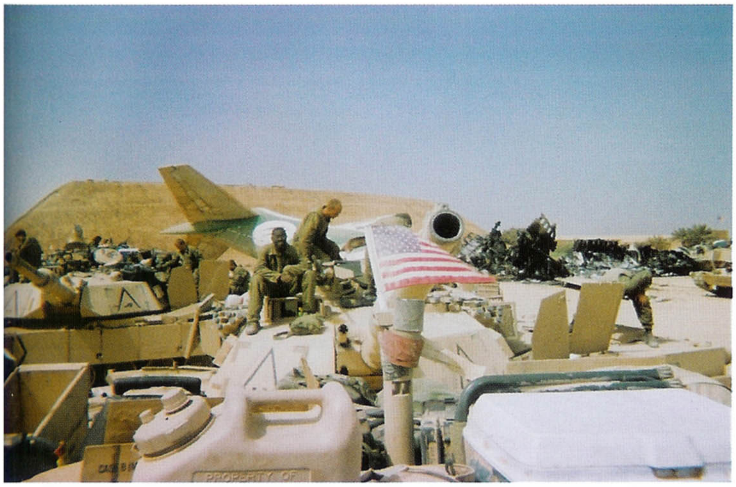
1-64's thunder run was so successful, it was agreed that another thunder run would be tried with a larger force as soon as possible.



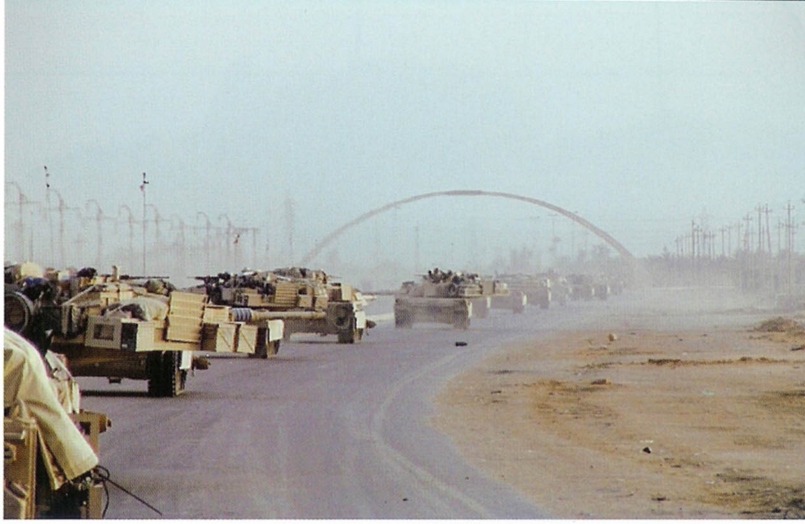
A civilian vehicle passes a Bradley going in the opposite direction on Highway 8 as the intense fighting goes on. Iraqi civilians believed their own propaganda that continued to broadcast lies that the coalition troops were being successfully repulsed in southern Iraq, despite the fact that the Baghdad airport had already been taken by the 3rd ID. This was one reason why 3rd ID leaders wanted to make a thunder run into Baghdad, to prove to all Iraqis and the world that the US was on Baghdad's doorstep.



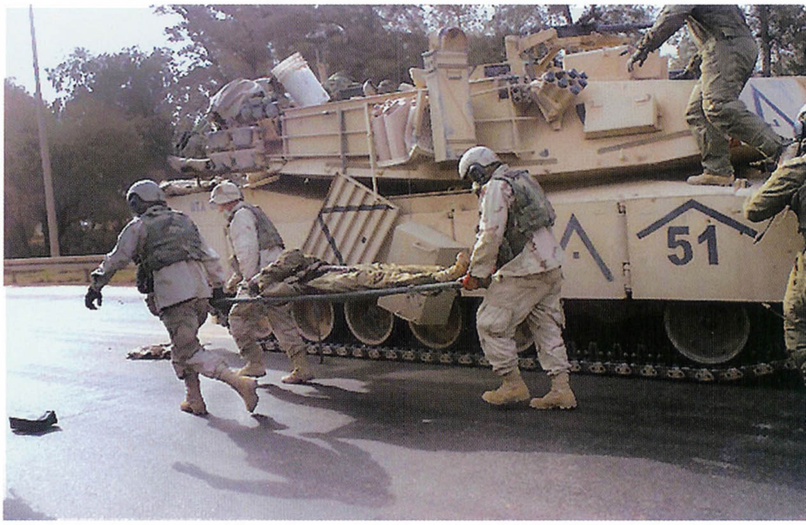
An ambulance version of the M113 APC advances along the highway, framed by palls of smoke from destroyed targets.



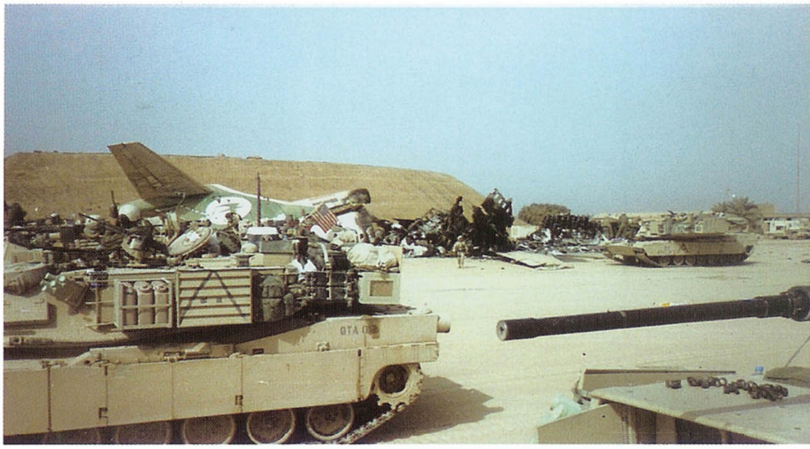
1-64 vehicles parked next to the much photographed Iraqi airliner. In the right foreground can be seen the top of an ice chest which was issued to every AFV crew from 2nd Brigade. It had a white top and dark green body. In the background two of the three crewmen still wear their small tanker's flak vest.



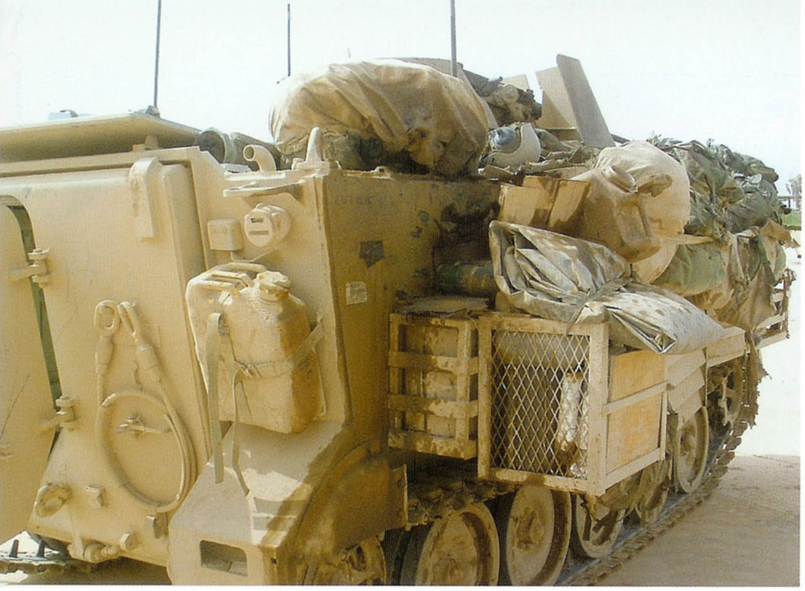
1-64's column continues toward the airport. TF 1-64 consisted of 100 tracked vehicles and as many wheeled vehicles. But for the thunder run only tracked vehicles were used. The main force of TF 1-64 was made up of 29 tanks, 14 Bradleys, and a large number of M113s. The TF had to travel 20 kilometers to get to the airport from Objective Saints.



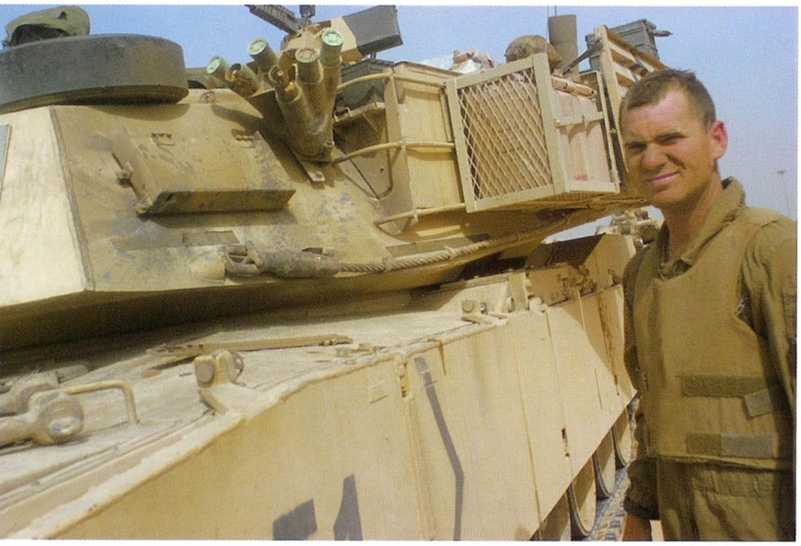
A seriously wounded TC is removed from his vehicle in the middle of the battle and taken to a waiting ambulance. American TCs generally fight open topped in their turret hatches and this was the case in the thunder run. Crews carried M4 carbines for close-in fighting as they felt they could put more bullets on target faster with the M4 rather than trying to slew the MG to the target.



SFC Olson's Abrams is parked in front of the airliner. He "lost" his razor wire well before the thunder run. In the right foreground can be seen the remains of .50-cal belt links.

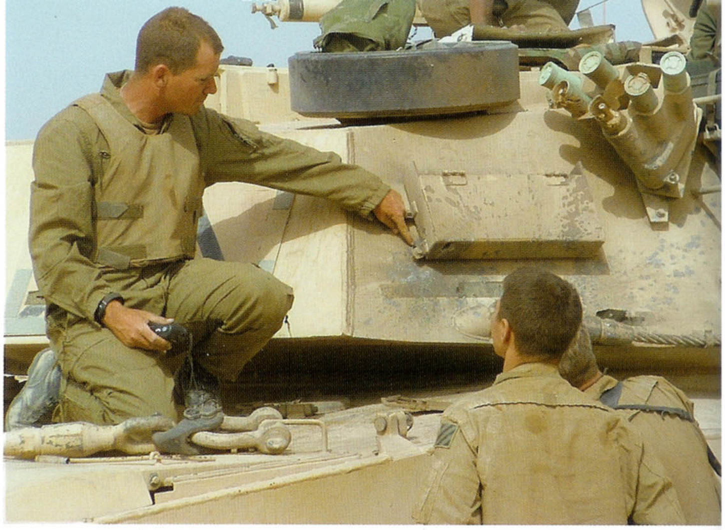


This crew has decided not to use the jerry can rack for jerry cans. So, to keep the small items from falling out they have wedged a piece of plywood in the opening. It is difficult to imagine this crew could have placed one more piece of stowage on their M113.



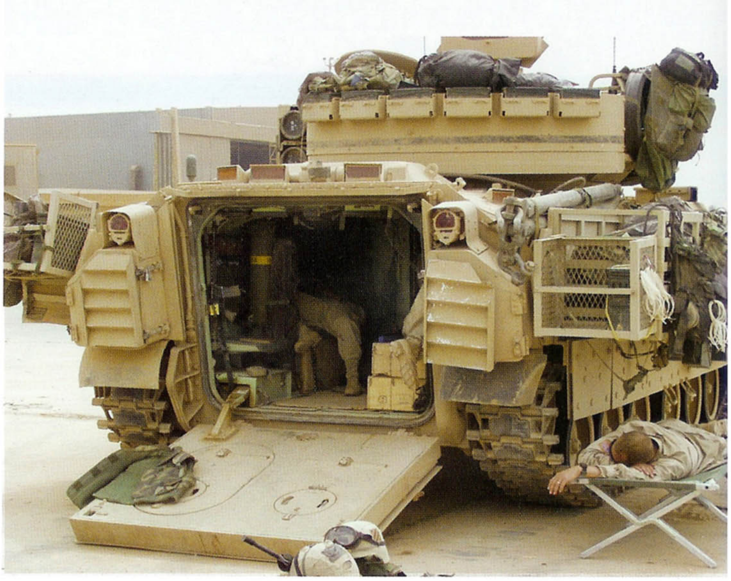
This crewman is still wearing his flak vest as he poses in front of his RPG damaged tank. Many crewmen preferred the smaller vest as opposed to the IBA, since the small vest allowed greater ease of movement in the interiors and through the hatches of their vehicles.

An American crewman carries out a closer "inspection" of the severely damaged Iraqi airliner.

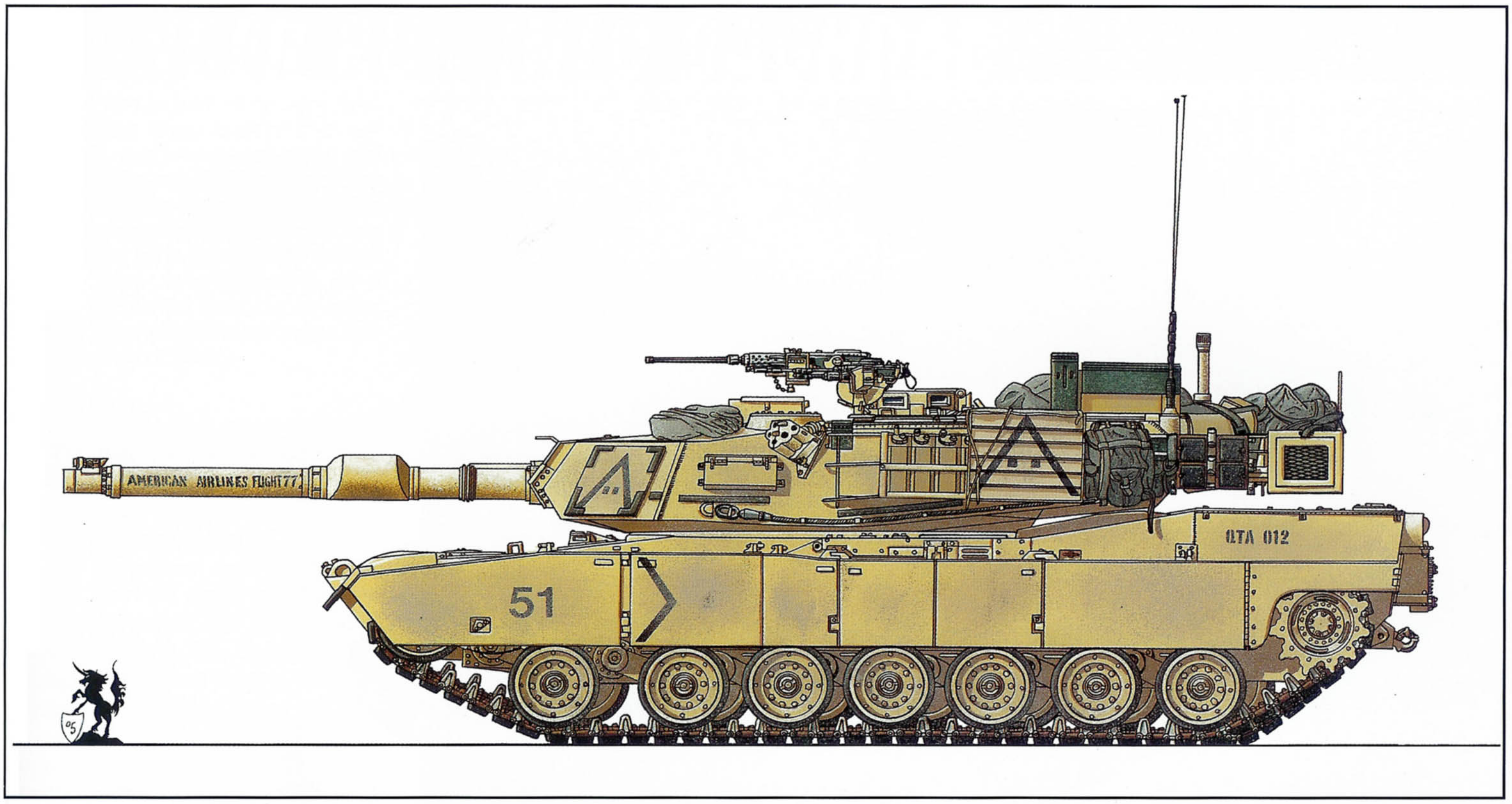


An M1A1 gunner points out the RPG impact on the turret of his tank. Surprisingly, the smoke grenade box was not damaged, but the smoke grenades in the launcher seen in the top right of the picture were damaged.

In a well documented incident from the thunder run, an Iraqi colone who also believed the propaganda that there were no US forces in the area was captured as he drove his private car to his unit. His car ran into the side of a 1-64 AFV and he was quickly captured. Here he is shown under guard by some of his captors.

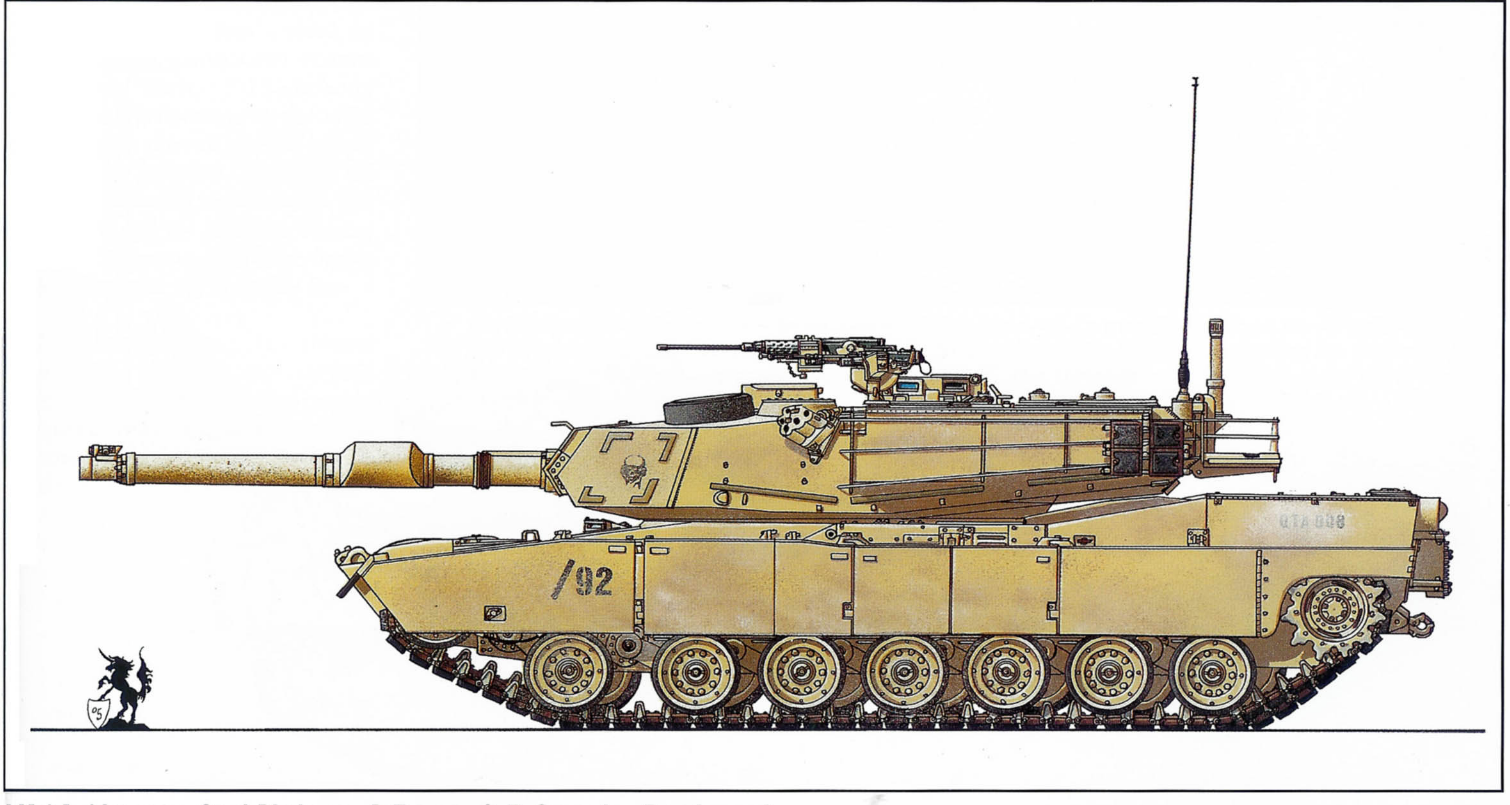


A Bradley at the airport. White plastic zip cuffs are hanging off the jerry can rack on the right side of the hull. A tow bar can be seen on the hull top above the jerry can rack. 1-64 had a day to rest and refit before they went back into the fight. (Busack)



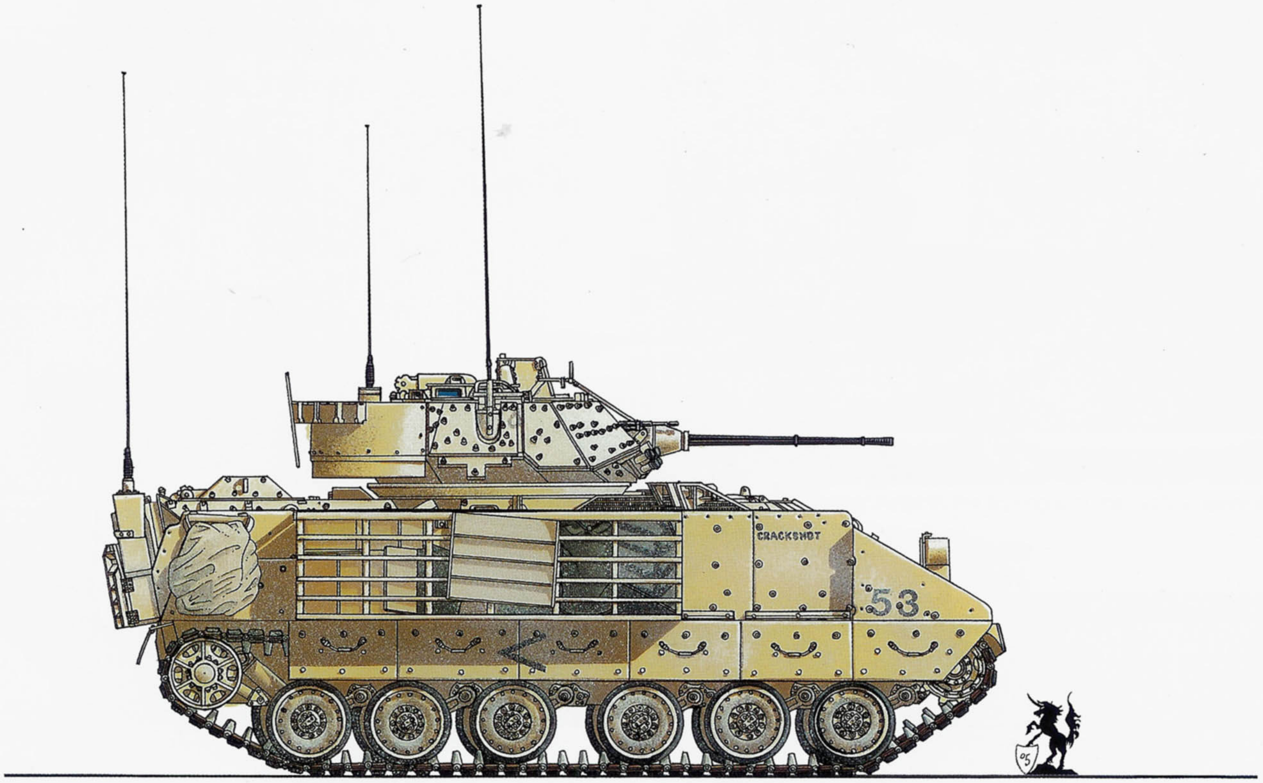
M1A1 Abrams, "AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 77", 2nd Platoon, Alpha Co., 1-64 Armor Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division

This Abrams was part of a platoon that named all four of their tanks after the planes that were hijacked by terrorists on 11 September, 2001. 1-64 went through some heavy fighting in OIF, and participated in both thunder runs in Baghdad. On the first thunder run of 5 April, 2003 this Abrams destroyed two trucks unloading enemy infantry with one MPAT round. Later in the same thunder run, White Four (this vehicle's call sign) destroyed a 'technical' with a mounted TOW.



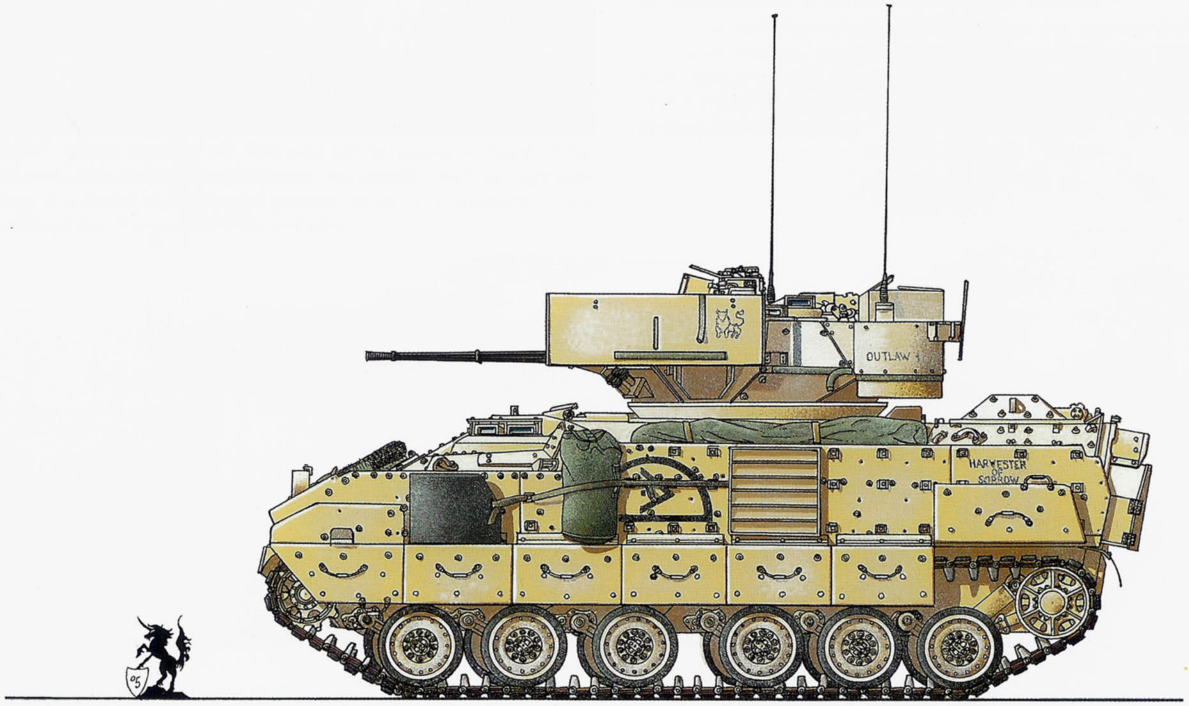
M1A1 Abrams, 2nd Platoon, B Troop, 3-7 Cavalry Regiment

Not all units nicknamed their tanks, as illustrated by the 7th Cavalry. The 7th Cavalry is unique in that it is an independent regiment with its own helicopter assets, so as to more easily carry out its specialized reconnaissance role. This particular tank was involved in a heavy firefight during the early stages of the large sandstorm which affected the campaign. While taking small arms fire and RPG fire from the front, it was struck in the rear by friendly fire from a Bradley's 25mm gun. The Abrams had to be abandoned along with another tank, a Bradley, and an ACE engineer vehicle. They were later recovered, but the crews had to find new mounts.



M2A2 Bradley, "CRACKSHOT", 3rd Platoon, Charlie Co., 1-64 Armor Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division

This Bradley was part of "Blue Platoon." Bradleys were normally attached to a tank company and became 3rd Platoon. Platoons were known as colors and were included in the call signs of the vehicles. Red was 1st Platoon, white was 2nd Platoon, and blue was third Platoon. Platoons were made up of four vehicles. 1 was the platoon leader, 2 was his wingman, 3 was 4's wingman, and 4 was the platoon sergeant. Thus, Blue One was the platoon leader of 3rd Platoon.



M6 Linebacker, 1-3 Air Defense Artillery Battery

The 3rd ID was one of the first divisions to be provided with the Linebacker. The Linebacker uses the Avenger air defense system that is also mounted on HMMWVs. However, the Stinger missiles are carried in a launcher that is very similar to the TOW launchers found on typical Bradleys, thus making it difficult for the enemy to identify Linebackers on the battlefield. In OIF the Linebacker was not needed in its assigned role since the Iraqi Air Force was grounded.

THUNDER RUN INTO BAGHDAD

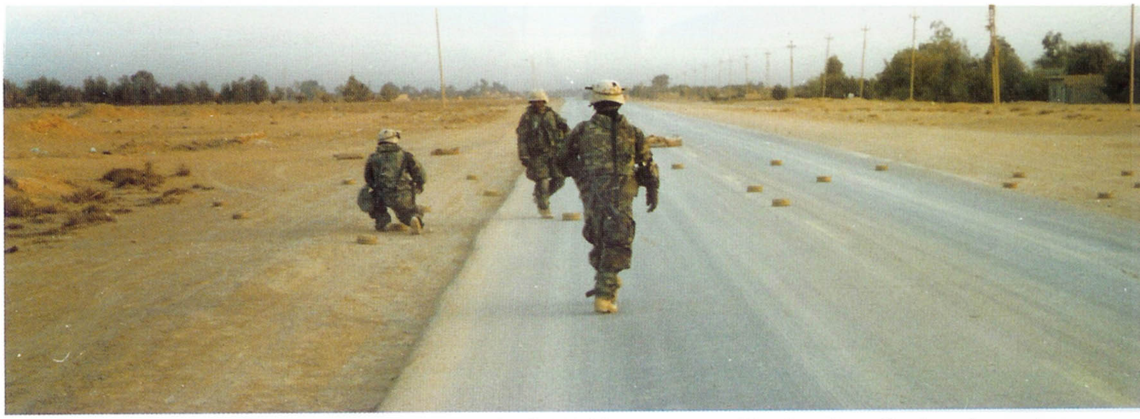
SENKANOBIE

4-64 Armor and other units from 2nd Brigade await orders that will eventually see them attacking into Baghdad itself. It was difficult for many platoons to get up to full strength at this point in the war due to breakdowns and replacement parts issues. One aspect that the Army is re-evaluating as a result of OIF is how units can be better supplied in an offensive campaign that captures ground quickly.

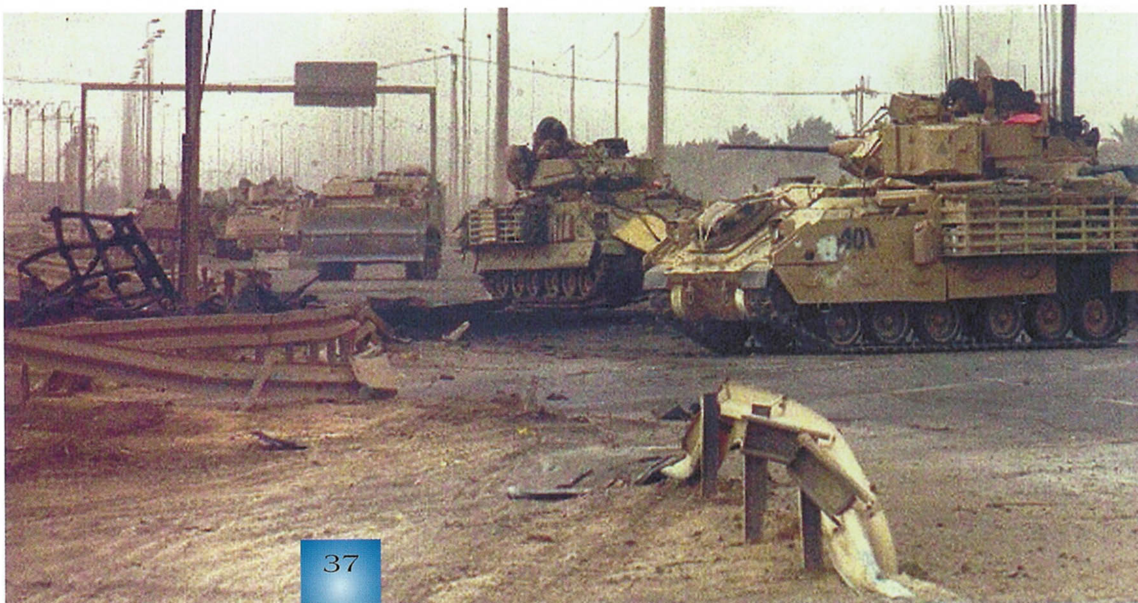
This time, the commanders tasked the entire 2nd Brigade to attack into the center of Baghdad. Once there, Saddam's palaces could be used as a base of operations and the regime attacked from the inside out. But this thunder run would not strictly be a recon by fire. It was foreseen that supplies would be an issue as the road overpasses could be used by the enemy to fire down onto the supply columns with ease. So, it was agreed that the major junctions, codenamed Moe, Curley, and Joe, would be held so the supply columns could pass on into Baghdad.

First, the engineers had to breach a large hastily laid minefield across Highway 8 after the first thunder run. Then each junction was cleared by artillery as the thunder run column approached. Next, 3-15 Infantry secured the junctions one by one as the attack column pressed on. The supply column then followed. However, the fighting was nearly as intense as two days earlier and the junctions became points of contention, with some supply vehicles succumbing to enemy fire.

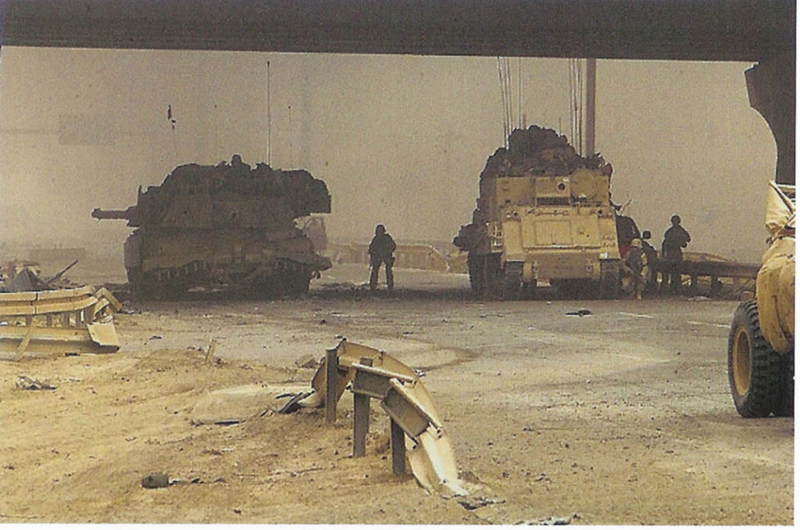
Still, the 2nd Brigade's column successfully attacked and secured Saddam's parade grounds and palaces downtown. Normally, such a scenario for an armored column would be suicide in a built-up area. However, the 3rd ID took advantage of the lack of coordinated defense and their boldness caused the defenses of Baghdad to crumble.



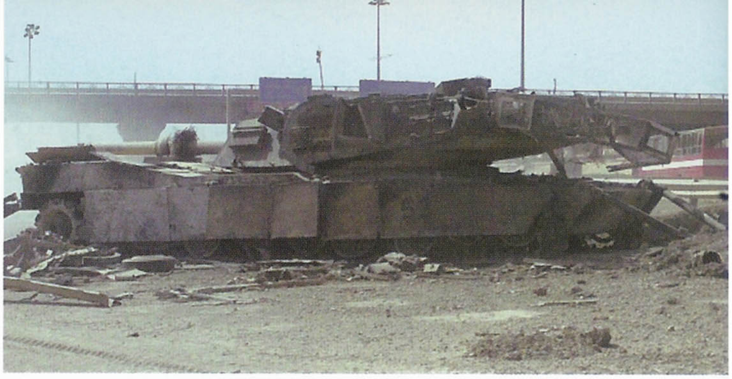
3rd ID combat engineers deal with an Iraqi minefield laid across a road to slow down the American advance. The 2nd Brigade attacked down the same highway for the second thunder run, but during the intervening lull, Iraqi forces had taken the opportunity to lay a minefield. The minefield was removed in the early morning darkness.



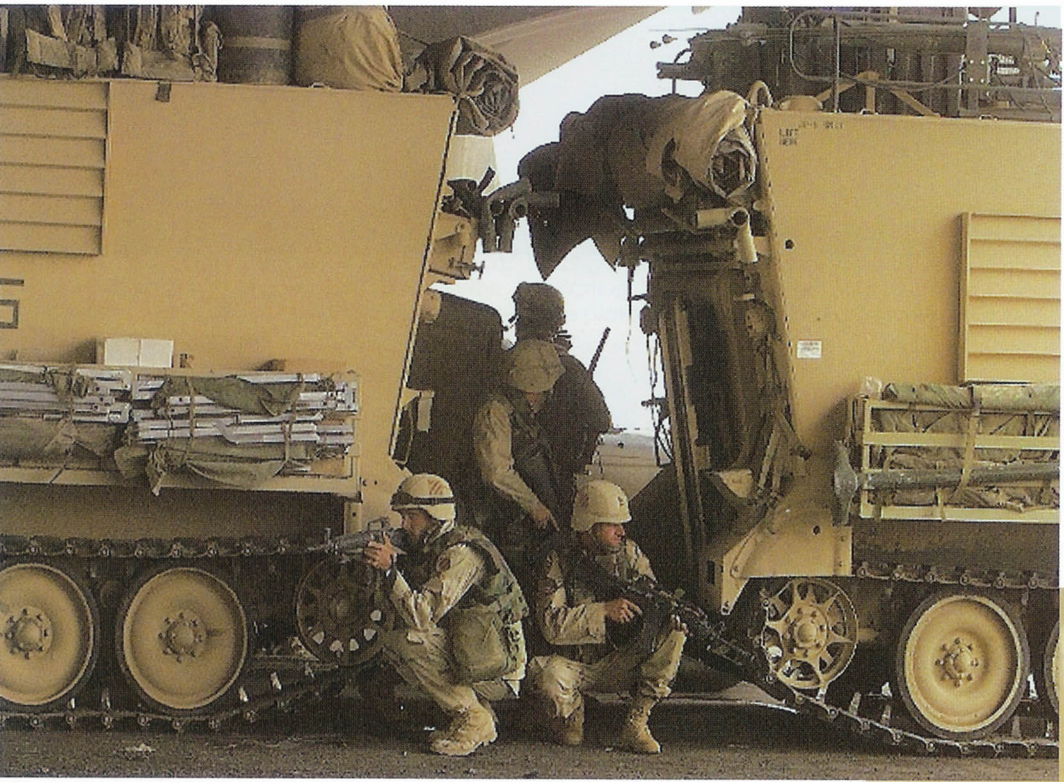
On 7 April the whole 2nd Brigade made a thunder run attack, this time into downtown Baghdad. The 3rd ID used the three main overpasses as pass-on objectives for the supply column, and so took up positions with infantry at each objective. The intensity of the fight can be seen here as an ACE dozer vehicle approaches one of the overpasses (Moe, Larry, and Curley).



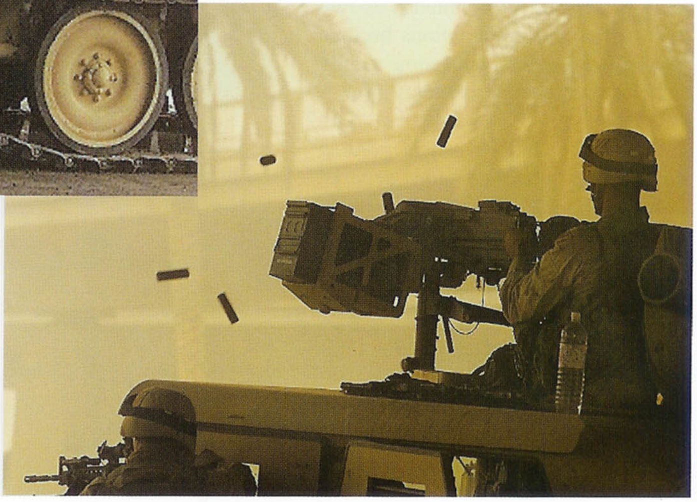
Moments later an M577 pulls under the overpass for cover as the rest of the column pushes on. Essentially, the men at this interchange were surrounded by Syrian jihad fighters. It was said a nearby building filled with some of these Syrians blinked like a Christmas tree from the constant firing within.



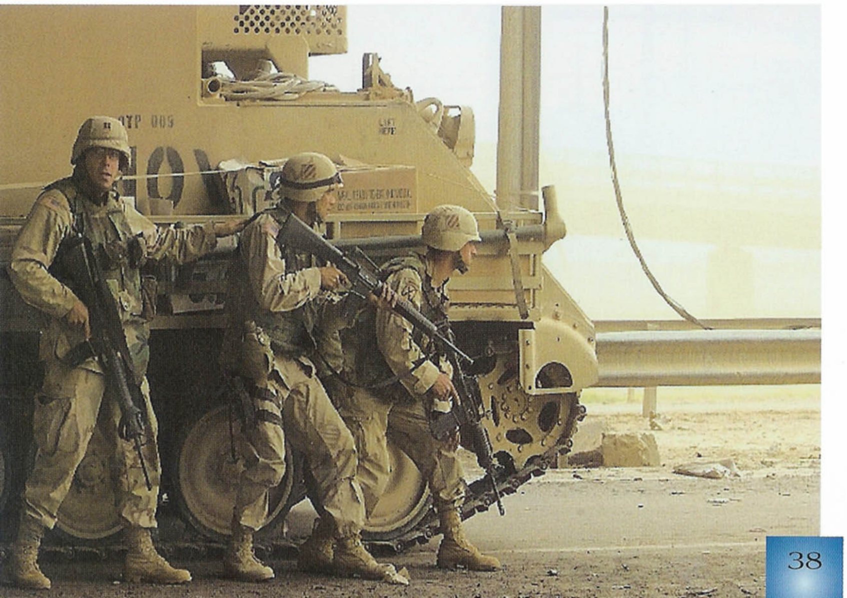
A somewhat blurry but useful photo of the remains of "CAJONE EH" which was knocked out by an RPG to the engine compartment two days earlier during the first thunder run. It could not be recovered under the combat conditions at that time due to the unrelenting fire in a fuel line, so it was left behind. Later, air assets fired a Maverick missile at the disabled tank before the Iraqis could successfully tow it away. Just out of the picture is a destroyed Iraqi recovery vehicle.



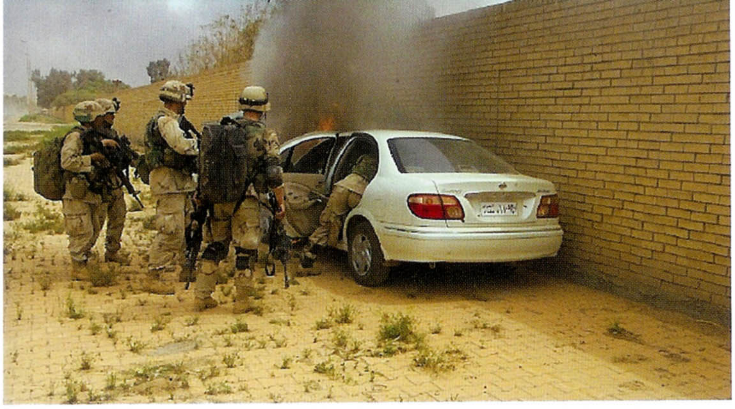
In the heat of battle M577s back up to each other to ease communications and to provide cover for each other. At Objective Curley another company of 3-15 was ordered to reinforce the surrounded men as they were in danger of being overrun.



A Mk-19 gunner pounds away at the enemy while another man fires his M16, as 3-15 Infantry defends one of the interchanges. It appears that an AT-4 is strapped to the back of the hatch cover.



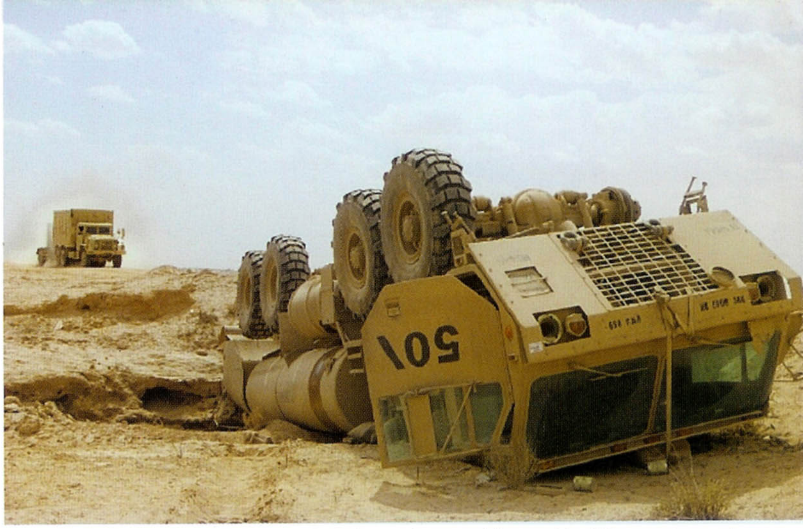
An infantry detachment helps defend the HQ unit under a highway overpass. Overpasses tended to be a hornet's nest. Iraqi forces attempted to use the tops to fire down onto passing vehicles, as well as using the shadows and abutments as cover. Trenches led from outlying points to the overpasses and were fortified with sandbags. The insignia of the 3rd ID is seen on the helmets of these soldiers.



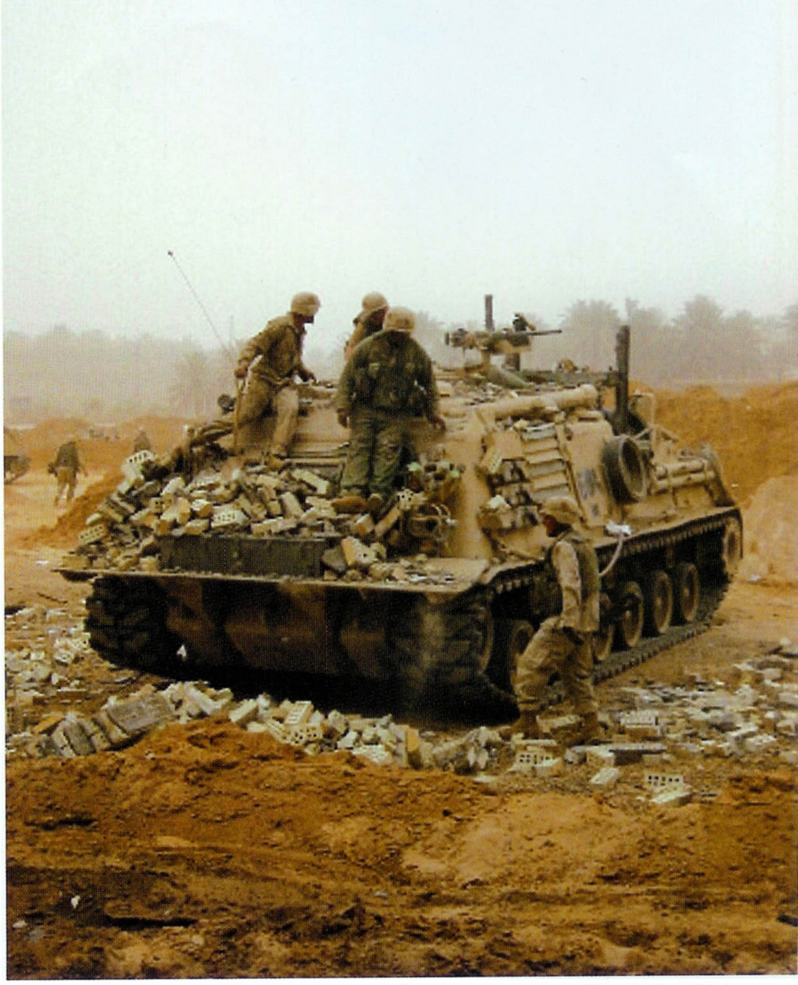
Even two days after the first thunder run civilians blundered into the battle. Here, a wrecked civilian vehicle is checked after the shaken occupants have been escorted away, while the battle rages around them. Fedayeen and other paramilitary groups fought in civilian cars. They attempted to conceal themselves among buildings and then attacked the column at opportune times.

Another abandoned T-72 encountered along the way in an urban street, as the ring is tightened around Baghdad. Oddly, many BMPs attempted to fight it out with US tanks, but it was rare when a T-72 fought. One such occasion was near Objective Montgomery west of Baghdad. 3-7 Cavalry ran into 16 T-72 tanks concealed behind an earth berm. Even though the T-72s had a momentary advantage in their hull-down positions, and called down their own artillery, all 16 were destroyed with no loss to the 3rd ID unit. This was accomplished with the help of the cavalry unit's Apache helicopters and artillery.

A Mk-19 gunner secures the very same overpass that was the site of the demise of "CAJONE EH" two days earlier. Another two days after the battle at Curley, locals asked permission to give the uniformed Iraqis a proper burial, but refused to help bury the large number of dead Syrian fighters due to their disgust for them.



Not all supply vehicles made it through, as evidenced by this overturned HEMTT. It was pushed to the side of the road to clear the way. As the 3rd ID moved closer to Baghdad, maintenance teams were stretched to the limits of their capabilities. Even though the LOC were secure at this point, the enemy was still trying to do what they could to disrupt it. The supplies needed to sustain combat were always able to reach their destinations, but getting spare parts to some units became problematic. Thus, many units resorted to stripping broken-down vehicles for spare parts.

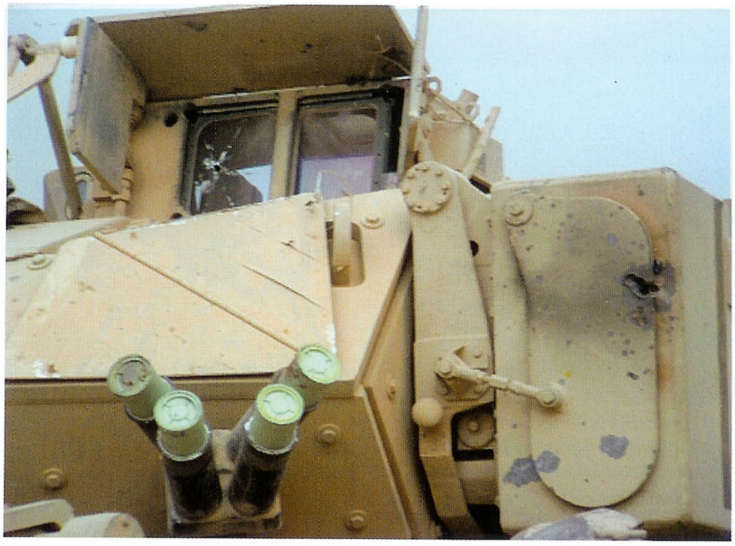


This M88 recovery vehicle was used to knock a hole in the 10 foot high wall that surrounded the 2nd Brigade TOC which was partially destroyed by a missile attack. The hole allowed undamaged vehicles to escape the fires that threatened them.

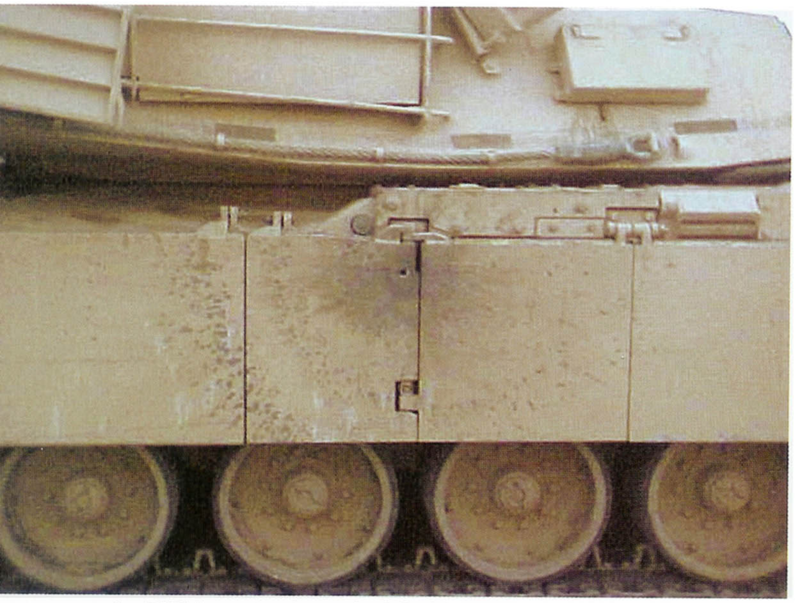
The new TOC was underway within 45 minutes of the missile strike, and here members are seen plotting their next moves. Now that the 3rd ID was in downtown almost all men were in their DCUs (Desert Camouflage Utilities), or in the case of AFV crews, in their Nomex suits.

Men of the 3rd ID confidently walk across Saddam's parade ground shortly after it was secured. The man to the rear is a dismounted tanker as seen by his Nomex suit. Dismounted tankers usually quickly switched to wearing the Kevlar helmets because of their superior ballistic qualities.

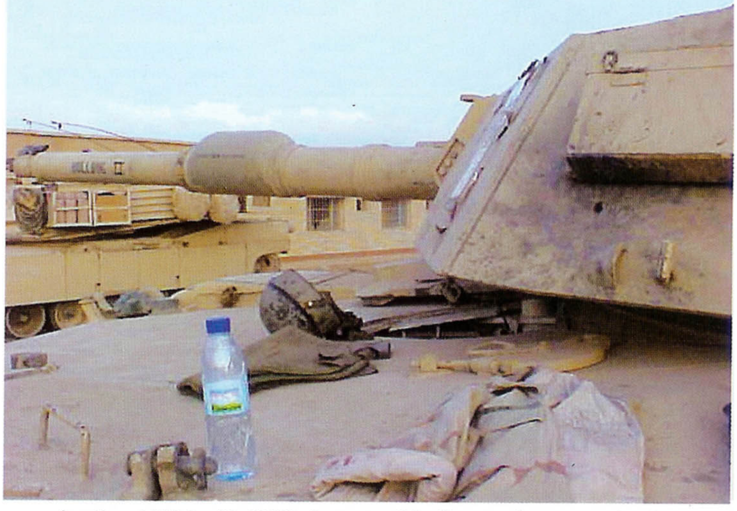
3rd ID infantrymen on patrol outside Baghdad order military aged Iraqis down to the ground. The soldier on the left wears both elbow pads and knee pads, but the knee pads have fallen down to his ankles.



A close-up of battle damage to a Bradley. Most damage sustained by the US vehicles was from RPGs, small arms, or artillery. It is not known what exactly caused this damage.

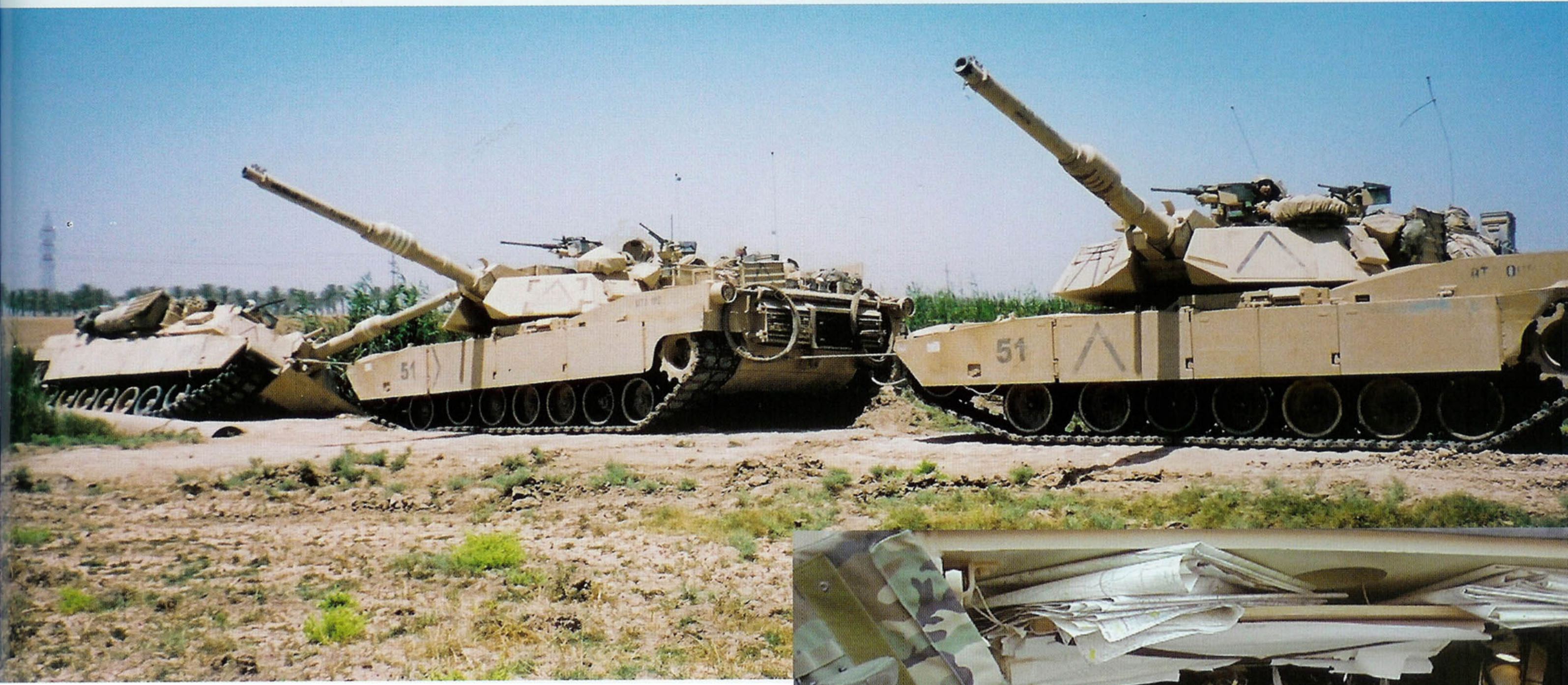


An RPG impact point to the left sideskirt of an Abrams. The turret has been traversed to the rear in this photo.



Another M1A1 with RPG damage, this time to the turret. Again, in yet another example, the smoke grenade box was not damaged despite its proximity to the blast.

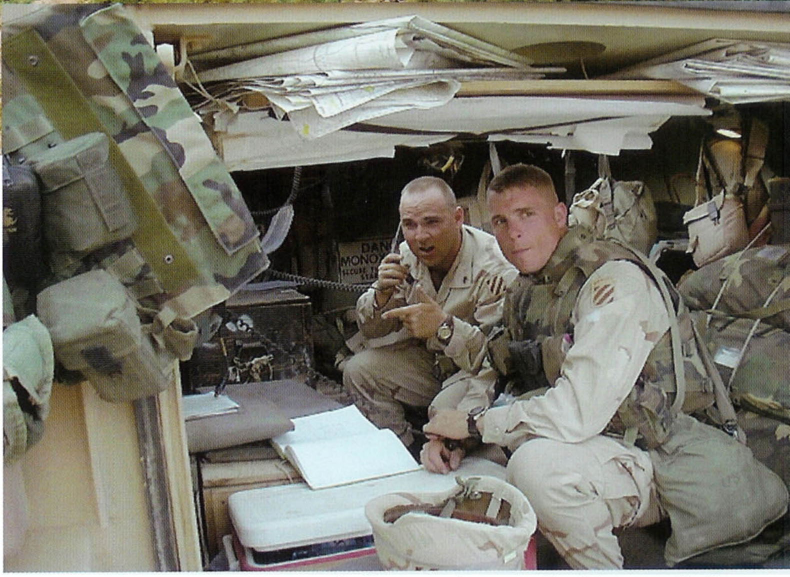
BAGHDAD SECURED



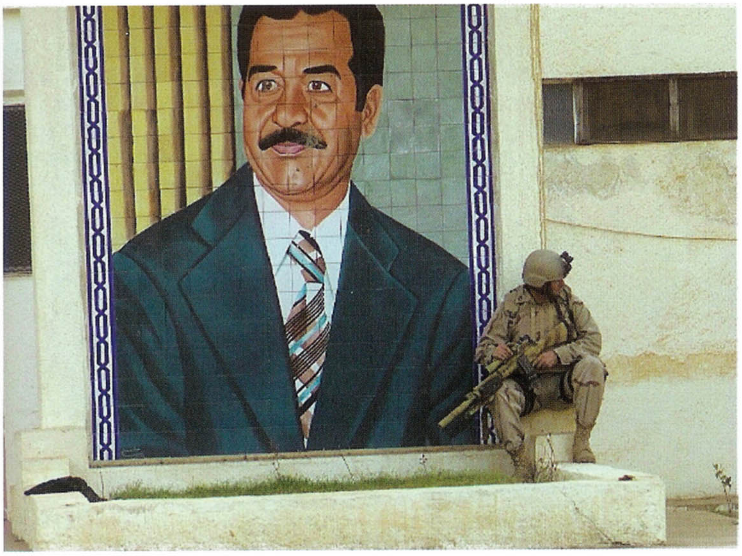
Two tanks were used to get the bogged down tank unstuck. Both towing Abrams' suspensions have flexed as a result of the tow operation. There was more than one way to carry the razor coils. In this example, the ground picket used for attaching the wire is wedged between the taillights and the wire is hung off the picket.

After Baghdad fell, the 3rd ID used the palaces as headquarters and bases of operation to secure the rest of the city, along with the help of the Marines, who had entered from the east. Resistance was scattered, but for the most part Baghdad had been secured by the 3rd ID and Marines as of 10 April.

The 3rd ID would patrol and man security checkpoints until their departure in July and August, but not before traveling to a city that would later become famous for headquartering insurgents, the city of Fallujah.

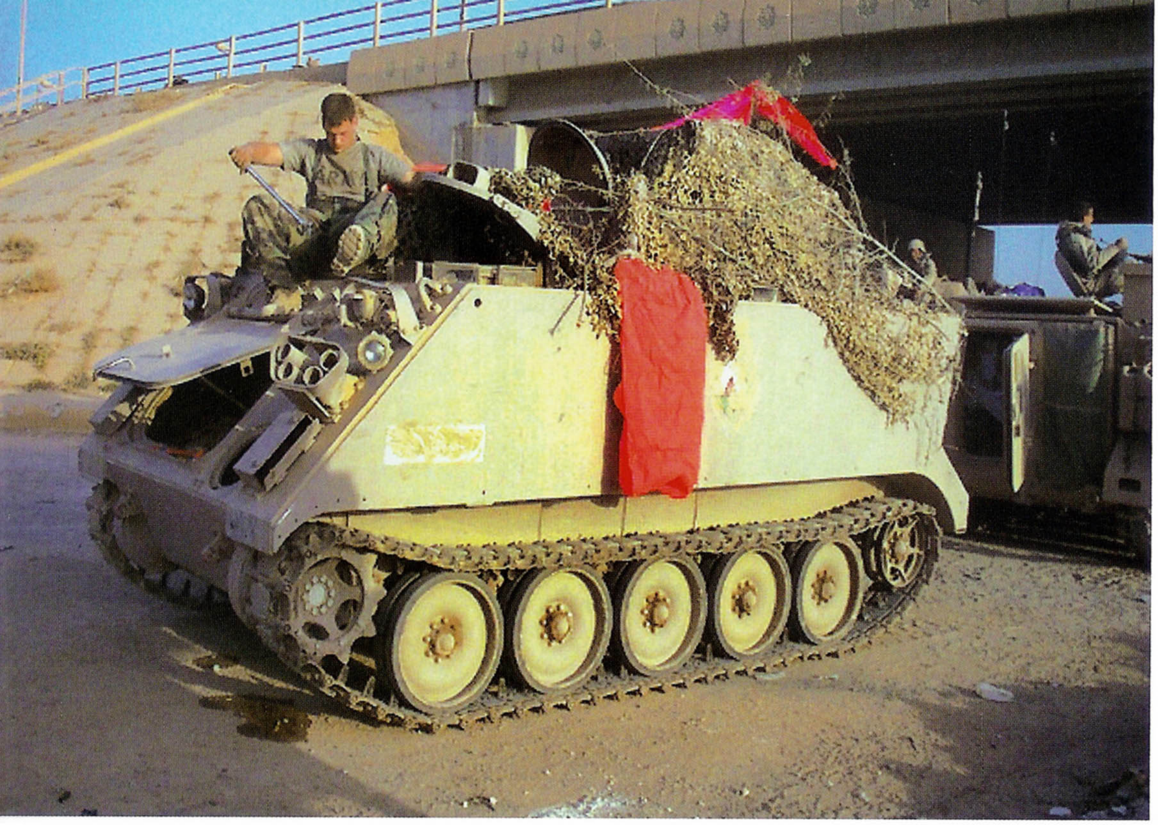


Inside an engineer M113 track. No space is wasted by this crew. On the right behind the man in the foreground are chemical suit bags. Engineer units mounted in M113s were very valuable in the city fighting since they were able to concentrate their small arms fire on second and third story targets, which the guns of Abrams' and Bradley's could not.



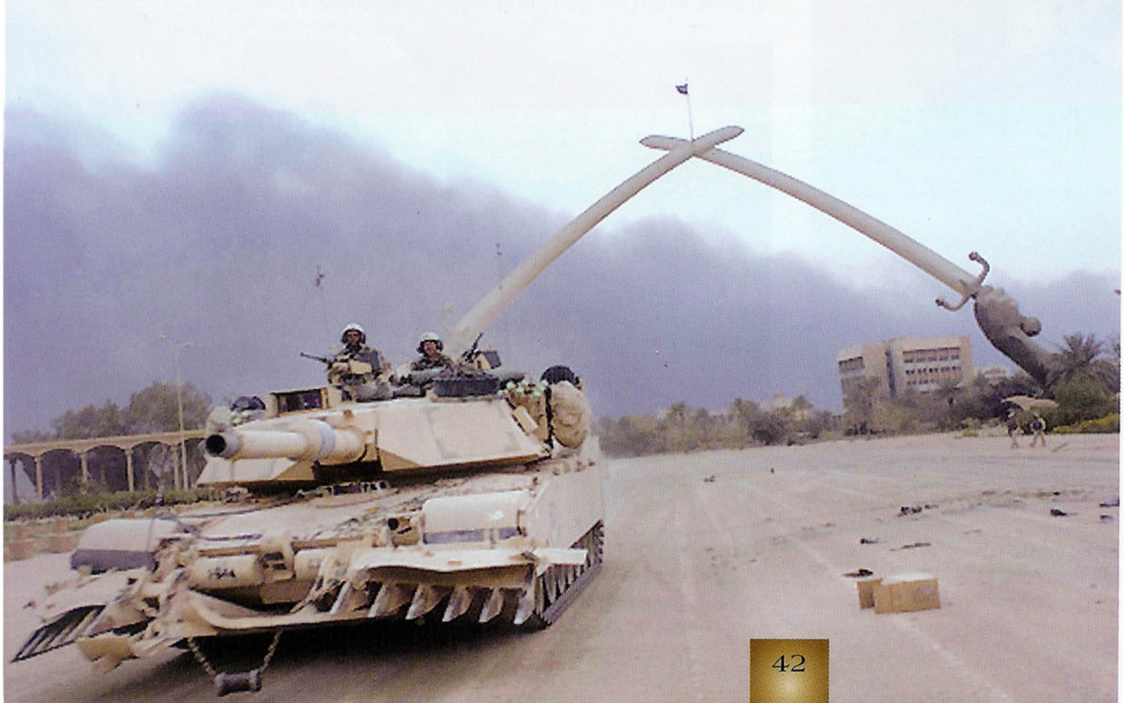
This sniper has removed the camouflaged cover from his Kevlar, painted camouflaged stripes on his rifle, and added a silencer to the rifle. He was also lucky enough to procure a desert camouflaged IBA. Sniper teams from both the Army and Marines were very successful in OIF. It was not hard to find a mural or a statue of Saddam, even in the most remote parts of the country. This mural has yet to suffer any damage, but soon enough it would most likely be torn down.

A view from the roof of a HMMWV on security duty just after Baghdad fell. Most HMMWVs carried at least one AT-4, as did M1A1s. Traffic immediately returned to normal after the fall of the capital and most civilians were happy to interact with the soldiers.

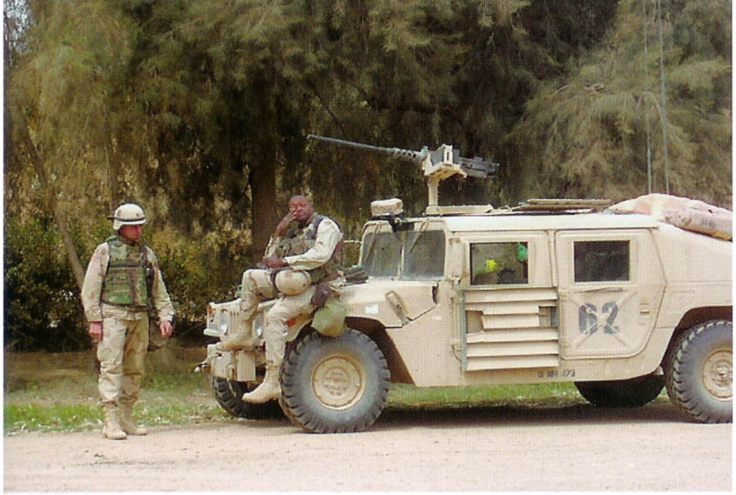


An M113 from an engineer unit receives some maintenance. Generally, M113A2s can be distinguished by their lack of external fuel tanks on the rear. M113A3s had the external fuel tanks. However, most A2 variants had the external fuel tanks as well. This vehicle carries the AN/V517 air identification panel, which was also common in the First Gulf War.

3rd ID men pull security outside one of the palaces. As observable here, most Army trucks and HMMWVs had the men's names stenciled on the windshield to give the men a sense of ownership for the vehicles assigned to them.

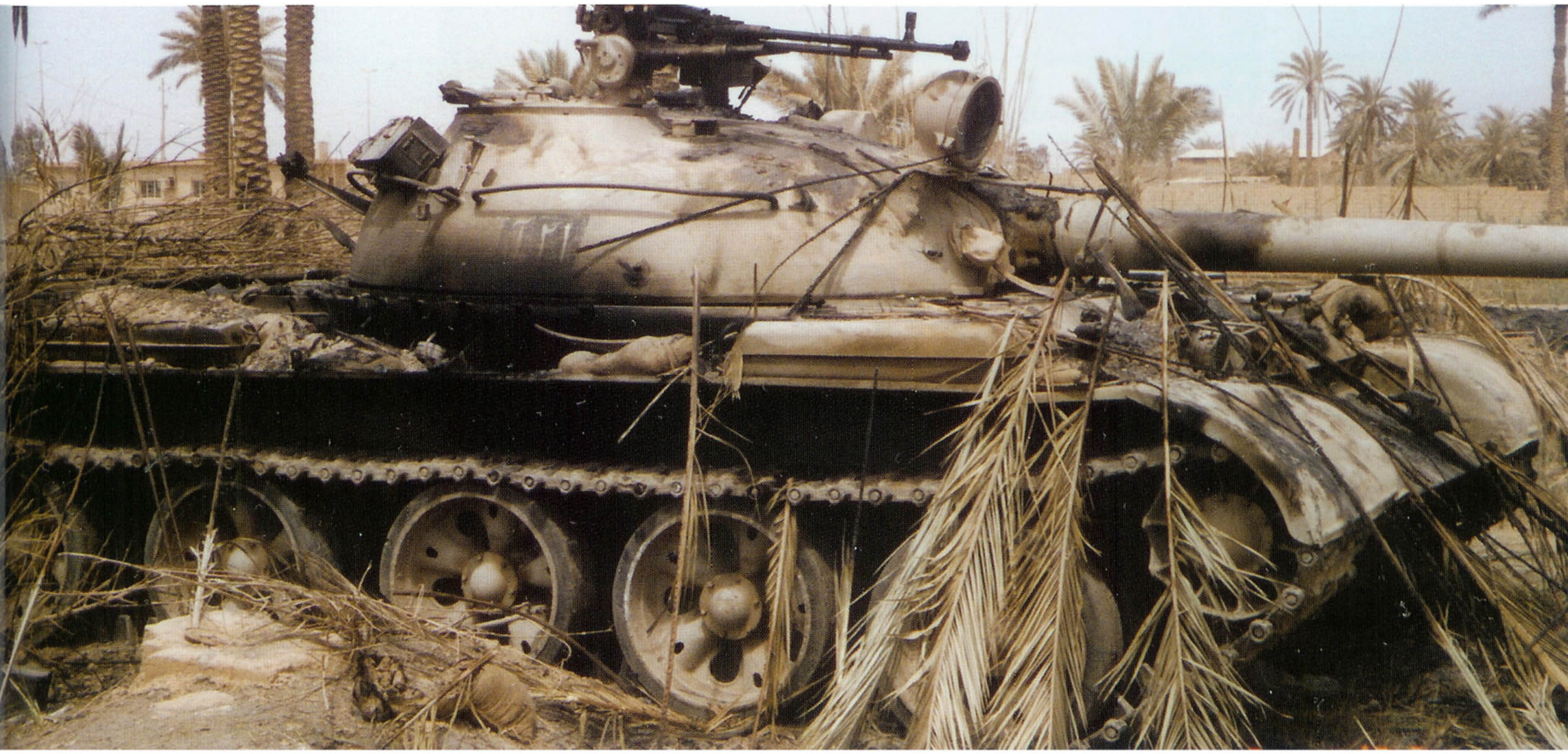


A mine plow tank passes under the crossed swords arch of Saddam's parade ground. To the men of the 3rd ID capturing and holding the parade ground was a monumental accomplishment. The parade ground had been heavily featured in the news leading up to the war, so most troops were aware of its symbolic significance.

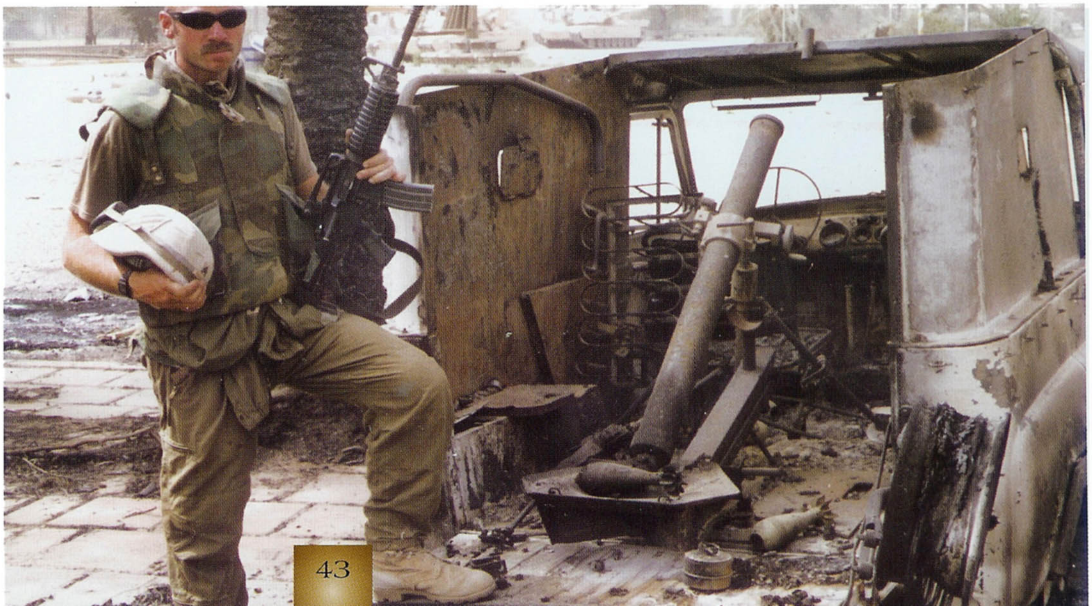


A HMMWV armed with a .50-cal MG and adorned with an orange air identification panel on the roof. The exhaustion from constant fighting shows on this soldier's face.

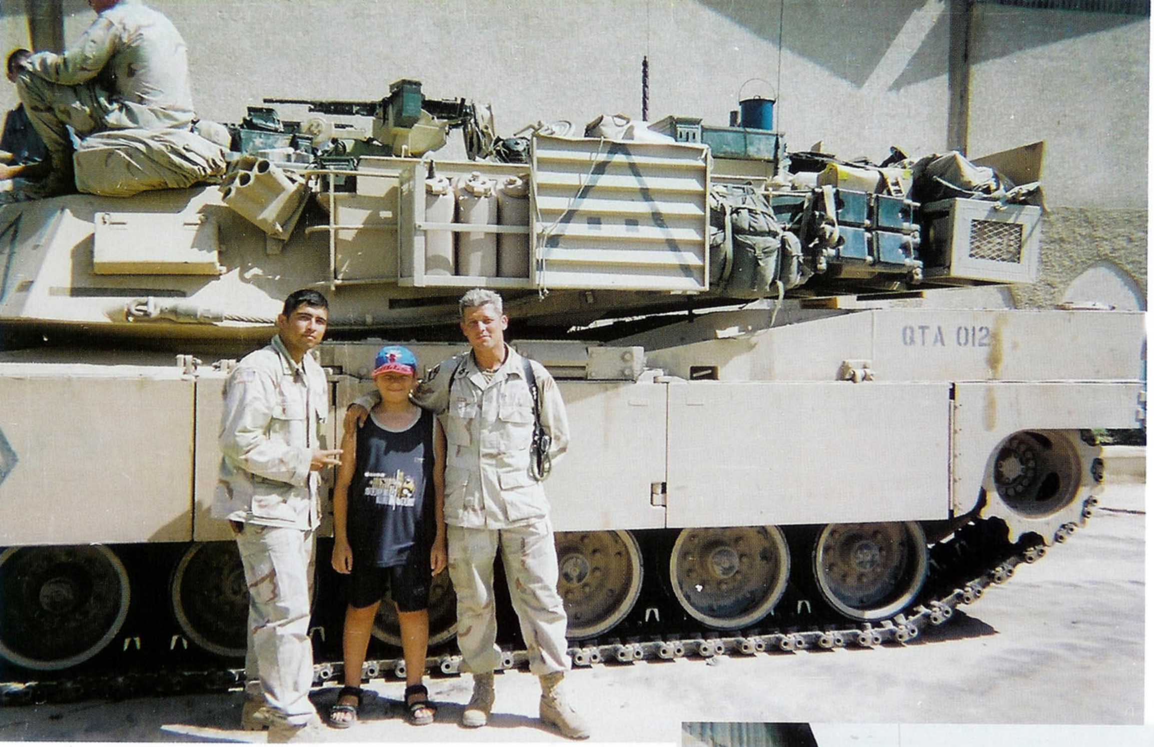
Soldiers allow themselves some moments to relax on some of Saddam Hussein's comfortable chairs, now that Baghdad has fallen.



A Soviet built T-62 covered in palm leaves. The thermal sights of US vehicles made Iraqi camouflage moot, although it was somewhat effective against aircraft. Since the Iraqis conceded the air to the Coalition forces there was little chance the Iraqis would be able to reposition their forces. If they moved anything other than a short distance, most Iraqi armored units were made to suffer accordingly.

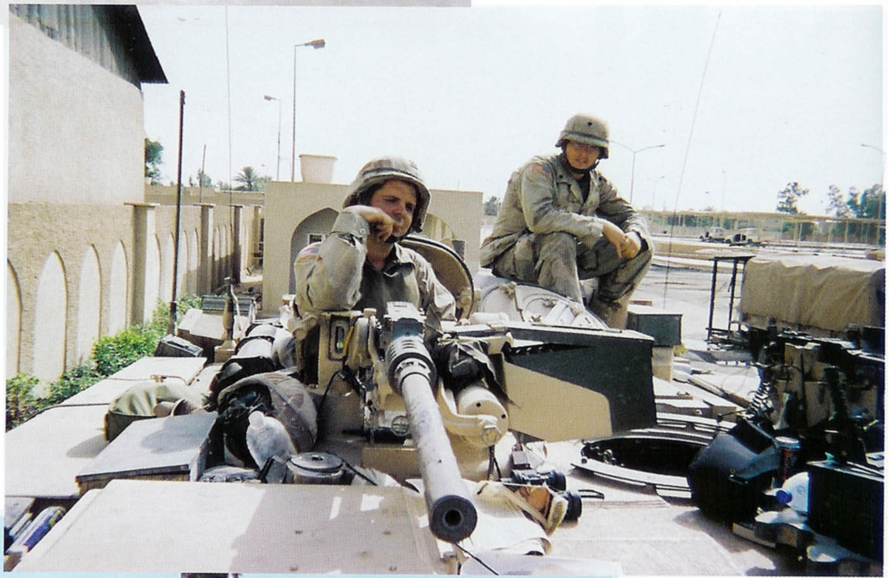


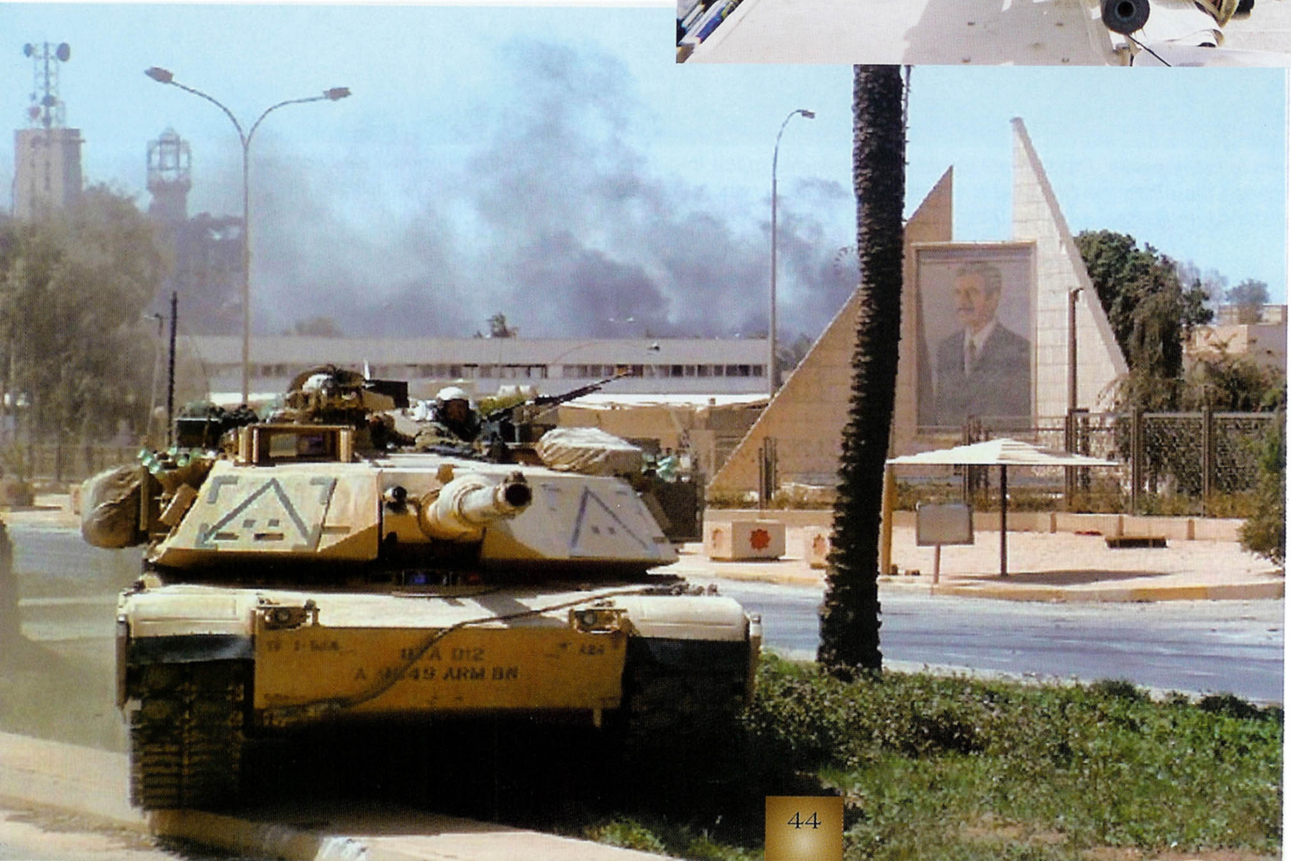
A 'technical' with a mortar mounted on the bed. The paramilitaries used all types of weapons mounted on civilian vehicles, from machine guns to anti-tank weapons to AA guns.



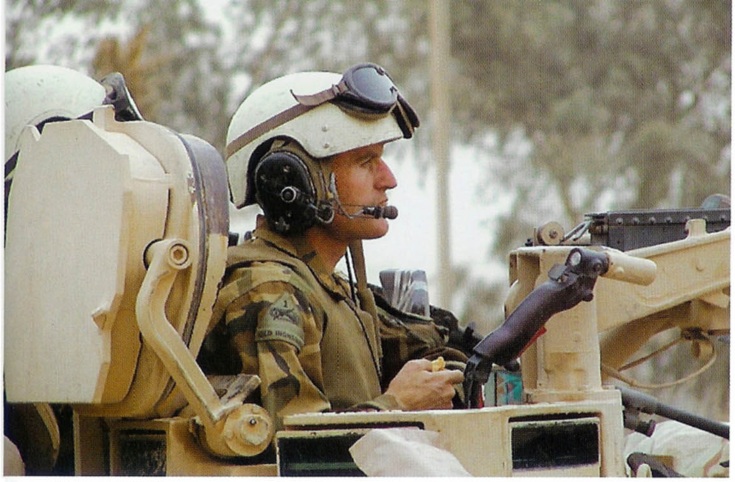
By now tankers are wearing their DCUs instead of their Nomex suits. Behind and above the CIP an EPLRS (Enhanced Position Location Reporting System) antenna can be seen with a black flag wrapped around it. The EPLRS is jam resistant, and helps commanders locate friendly forces in order to better manage the battlefield. Vehicles so equipped can also communicate by text messaging others.

A good view of the clutter aboard an M1A1. The .50-cal gun barrel of Sgt. Olson's tank shows the remains of a plastic garbage bag that was used to protect the gun from dust. When he eventually had to fire through the bag, the heat from the gun melted the bag onto the barrel.

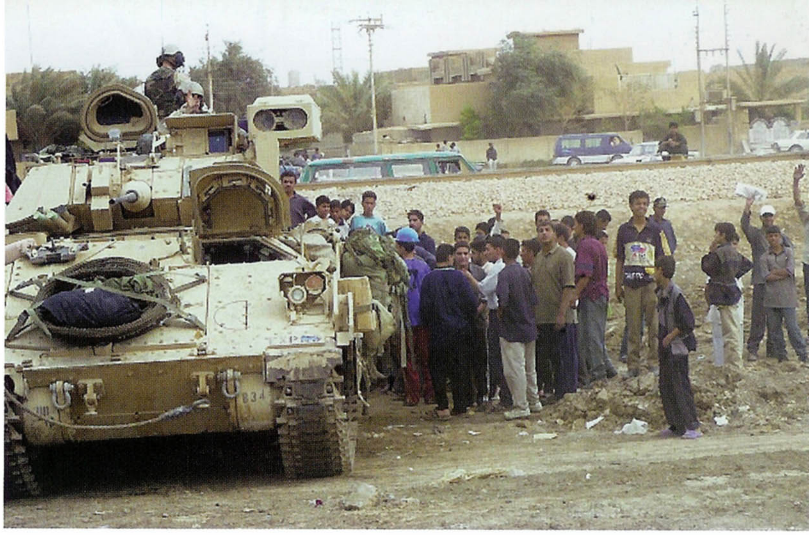




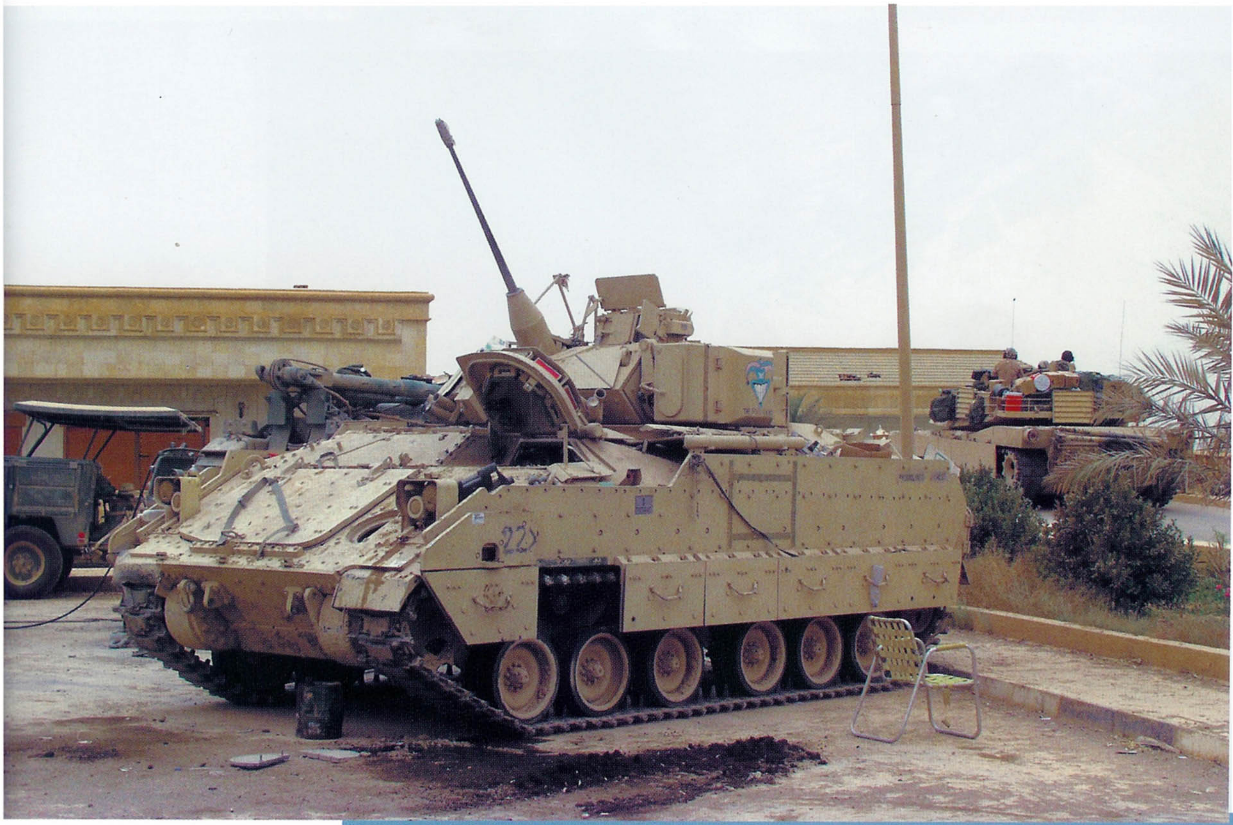
After Baghdad fell there was still intermittent fighting, especially outside Baghdad. Here, the Iraqi equivalent of the FBI building is attacked by an Abrams from 2nd Platoon, Alpha Co.



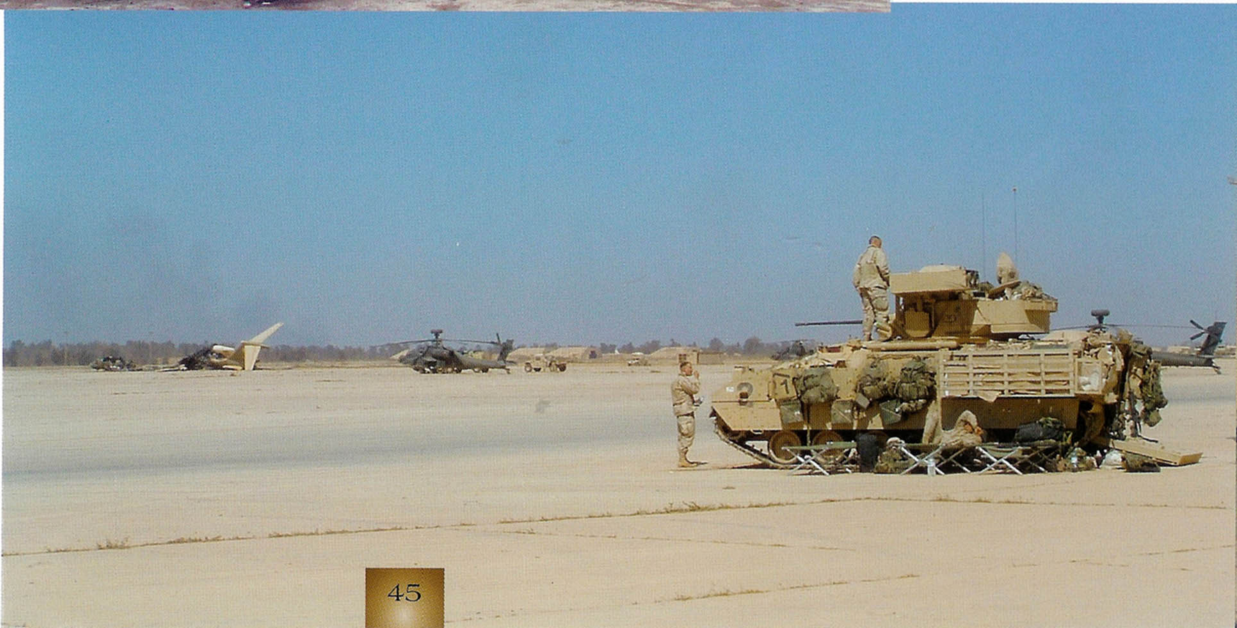
TCs had the option of using a remote control powered handle to maneuver the .50-cal mount. However, most TCs felt it was too fast and not easily controlled, so it is rarely seen mounted in its spot next to the .50-cal "hot dog" sight. Here, the joystick-like powered handle is mounted and ready to use.



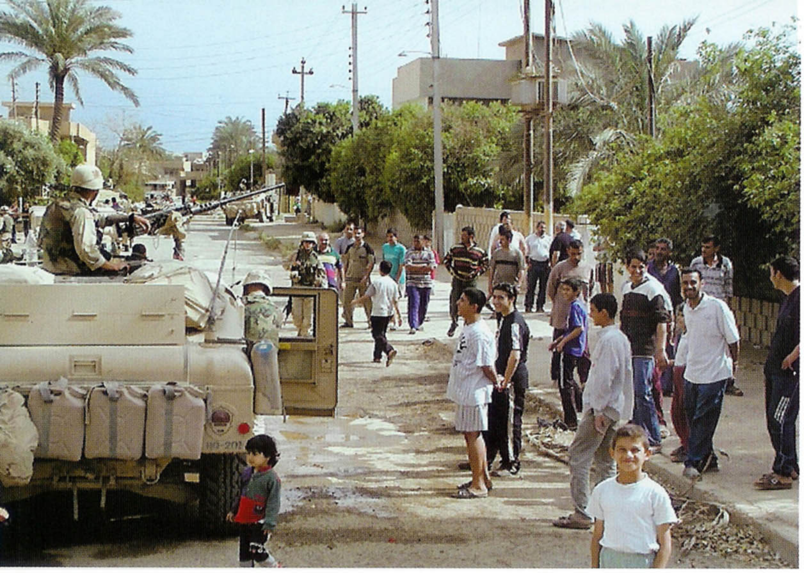
In Baghdad, locals huddle around a Bradley at a checkpoint. Most Bradleys, like this one, carried a coil of razor wire for security purposes. In the early weeks and months after the fall of Baghdad Iraqi citizens were eager to meet Americans.



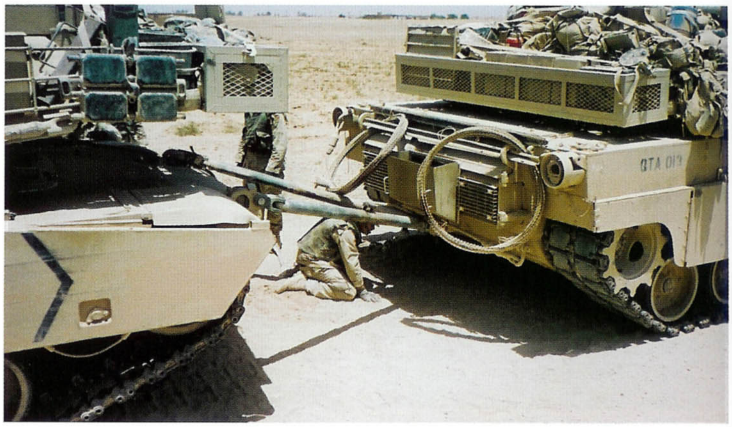
A 1st Brigade Bradley near the airport after it was secured. The crew has covered the end of the gun barrel with plastic to protect it against the dust. This vehicle is nicknamed "THE JOKE'S ON YOU" and has a joker face above the name. The empty square on the side of the IFV is Velcro tape used to mount the corrugated CIP. The tanks from 1st Brigade did not have the extended bustle rack or the jerry can racks. (Busack)



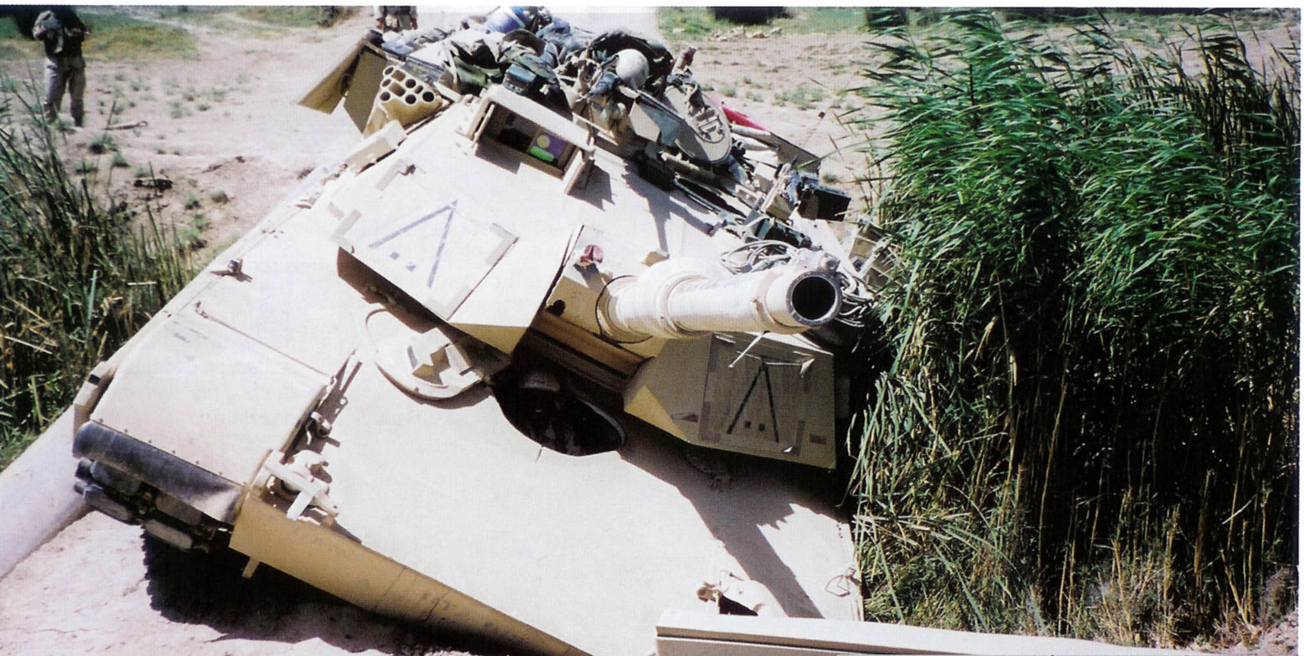
After the airport was secured Apaches wasted no time in using the airport as a base of operations for supporting the fighting in and around Baghdad. Here they can be seen spread out on the airport's tarmac. (Busack)



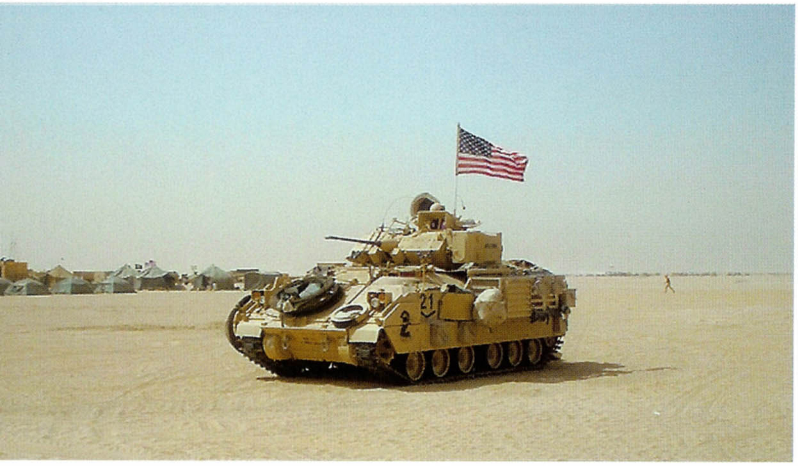
Iraqis come out to meet 3rd ID soldiers as they patrol through Baghdad in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the capital city. This .50-cal armed HMMWV is festooned with jerry cans on both the rear and the sides of the vehicle.



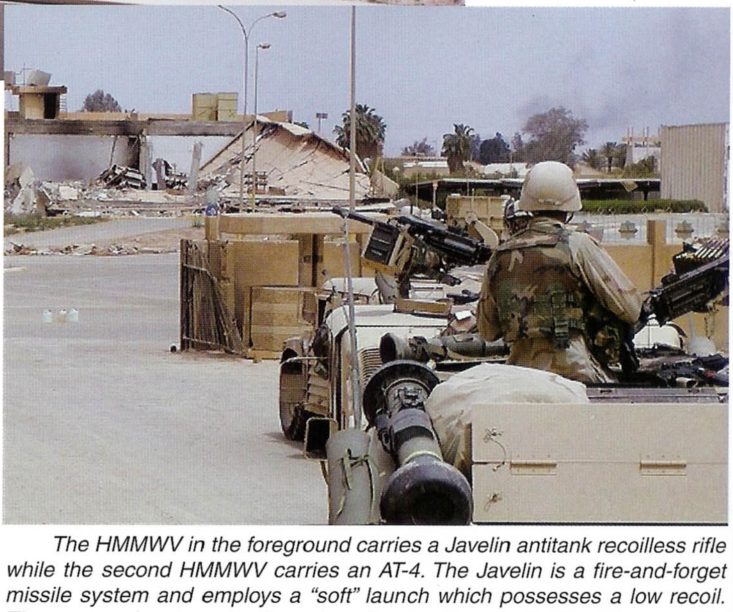
Normally, tanks did not tow other tanks, as this was the job of the M88. When a tank does have to tow another tank, doctrine dictates that the exhaust deflector shield be mounted over the exhaust, and then the tow bar attached. In OIF M88s were not able to keep up with offensive operations, and so there were more instances than anticipated where tanks towed other tanks.



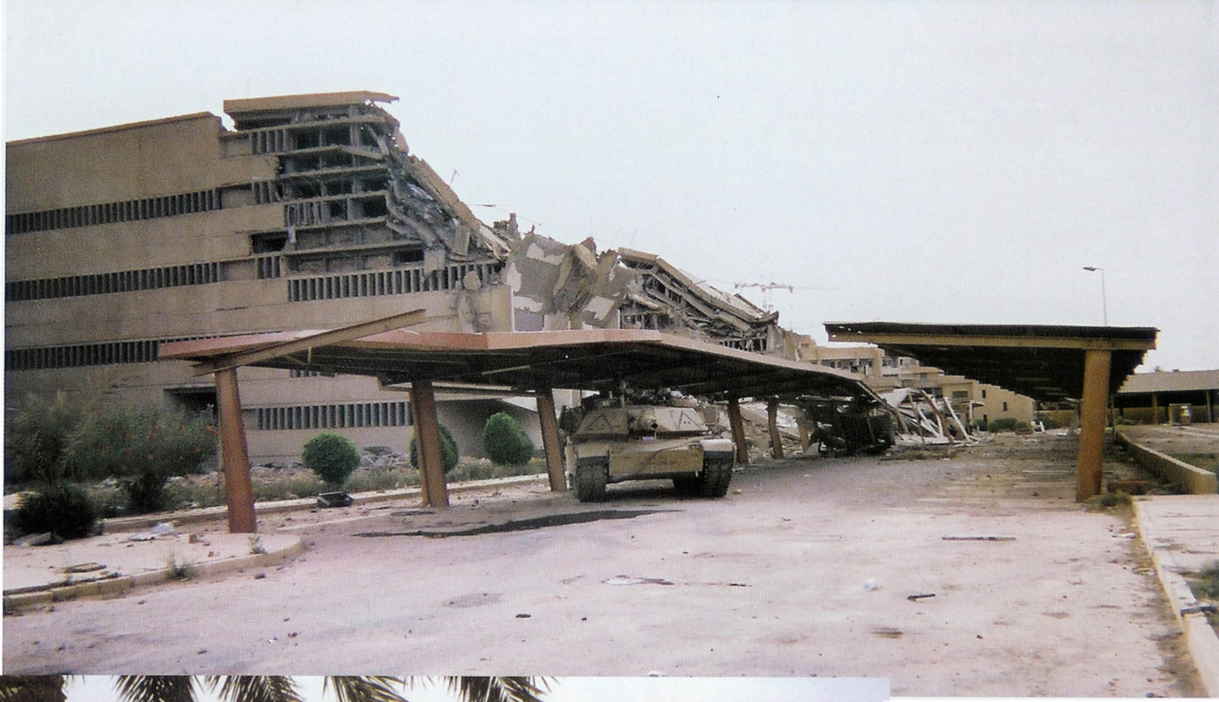
The 3rd ID did not stay idle after the fall of Baghdad. Platoons continued to patrol outside the city, and here an M1A1 became bogged when a dirt bridge collapsed as the heavy tank crossed over it.



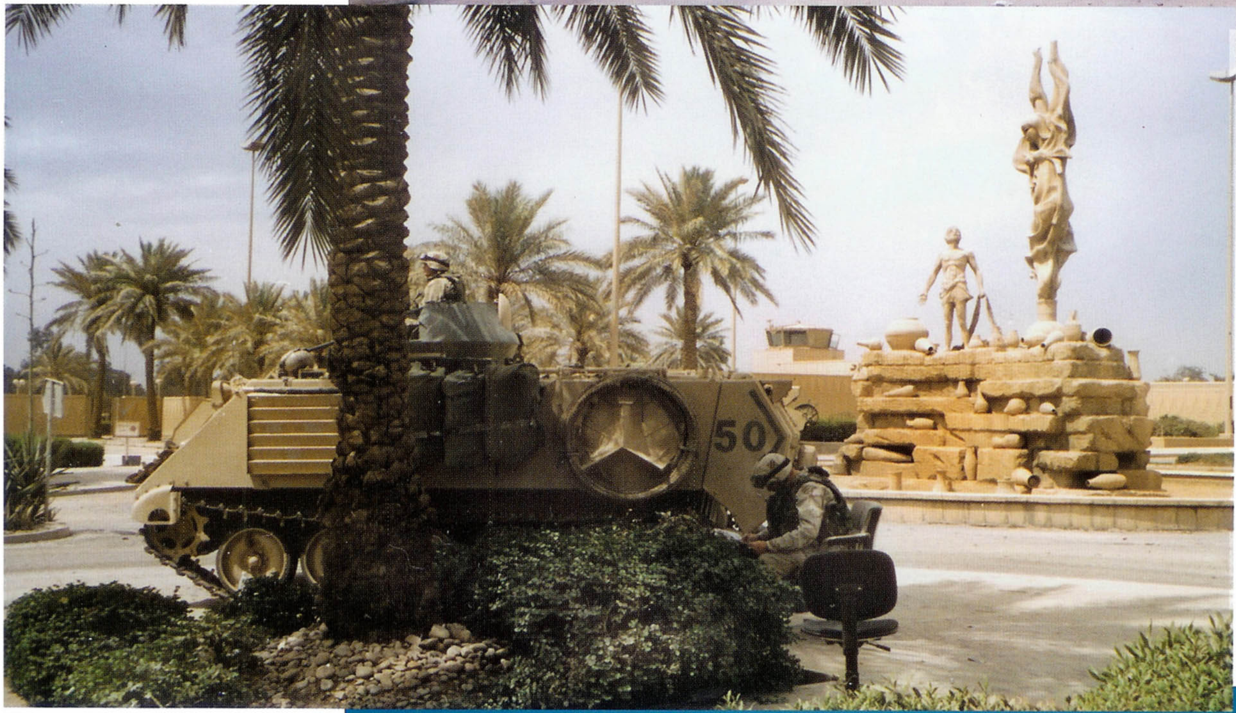
A First Brigade Bradley proudly flies the American flag. This Bradley has two razor coils piled onto the engine access panel and personal gear stowed inside the coils. It appears a third coil is hanging off the right side of the IFV.



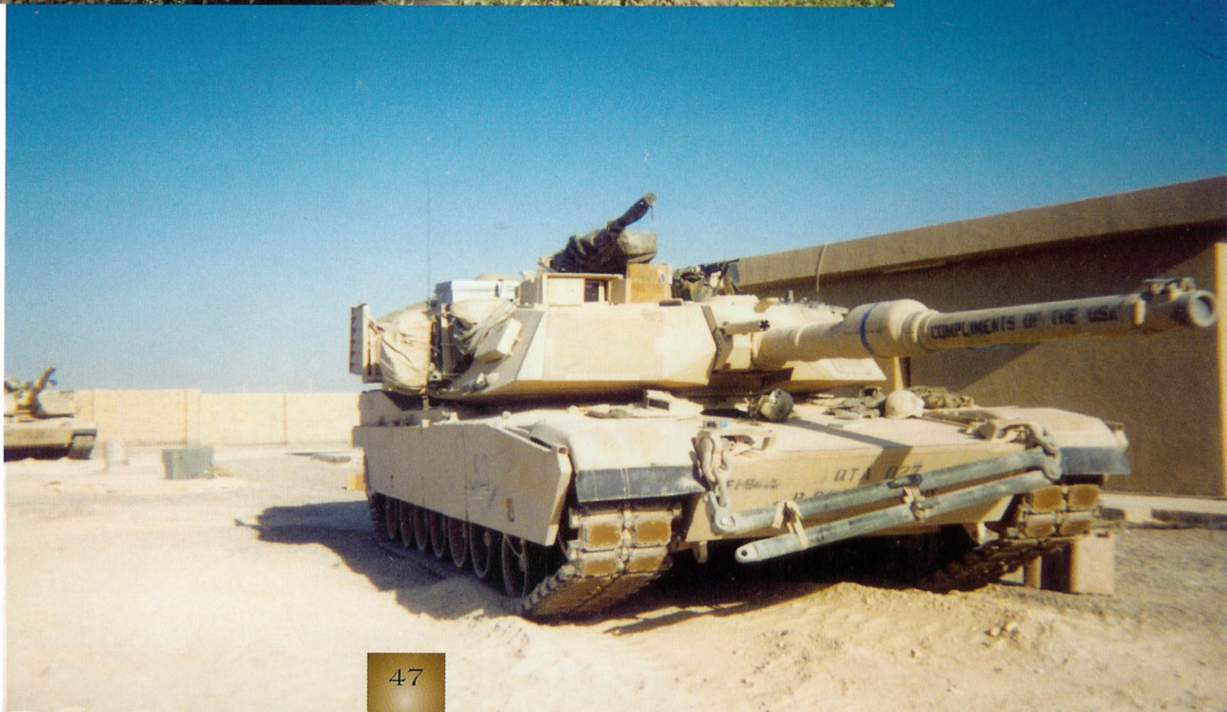
The HMMWV in the foreground carries a Javelin antitank recoilless rifle while the second HMMWV carries an AT-4. The Javelin is a fire-and-forget missile system and employs a "soft" launch which possesses a low recoil. The weapon has two attack modes, direct or top attack. Direct is meant for building, bunkers, and helicopters. Top attack is meant to be employed against armored vehicles where the armor is thinnest.



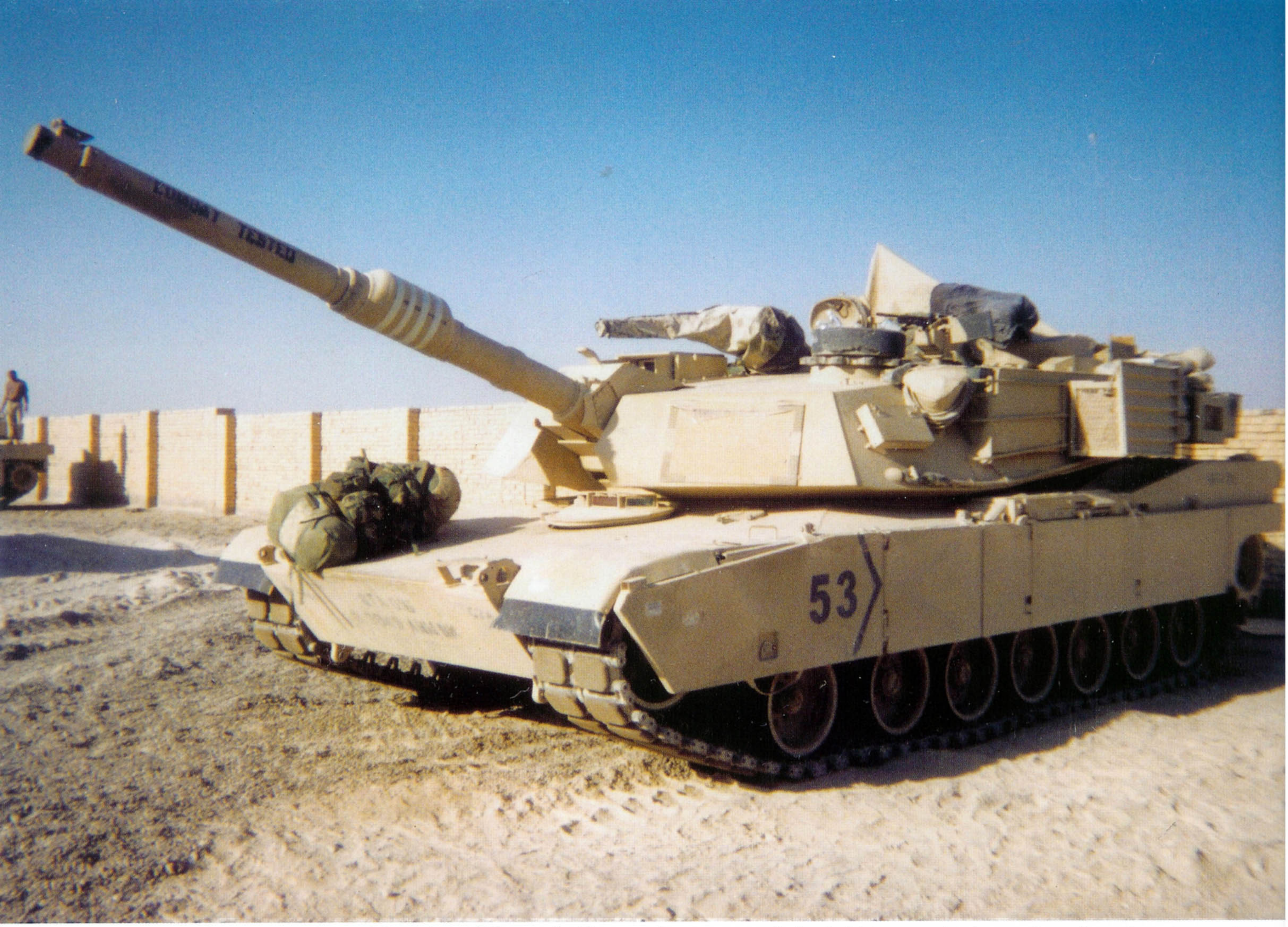
An Abrams is parked under an overhanging roof, with a destroyed building in the background. Days, and then weeks, go by of waiting to go home. Morale started to sink in many units as boredom set in and then anxiety. Rumors flew as to when the men would get to go home and after a short time all that many men thought about was going home. The 3rd ID was not trained in security duties and it became an issue for many of the soldiers.



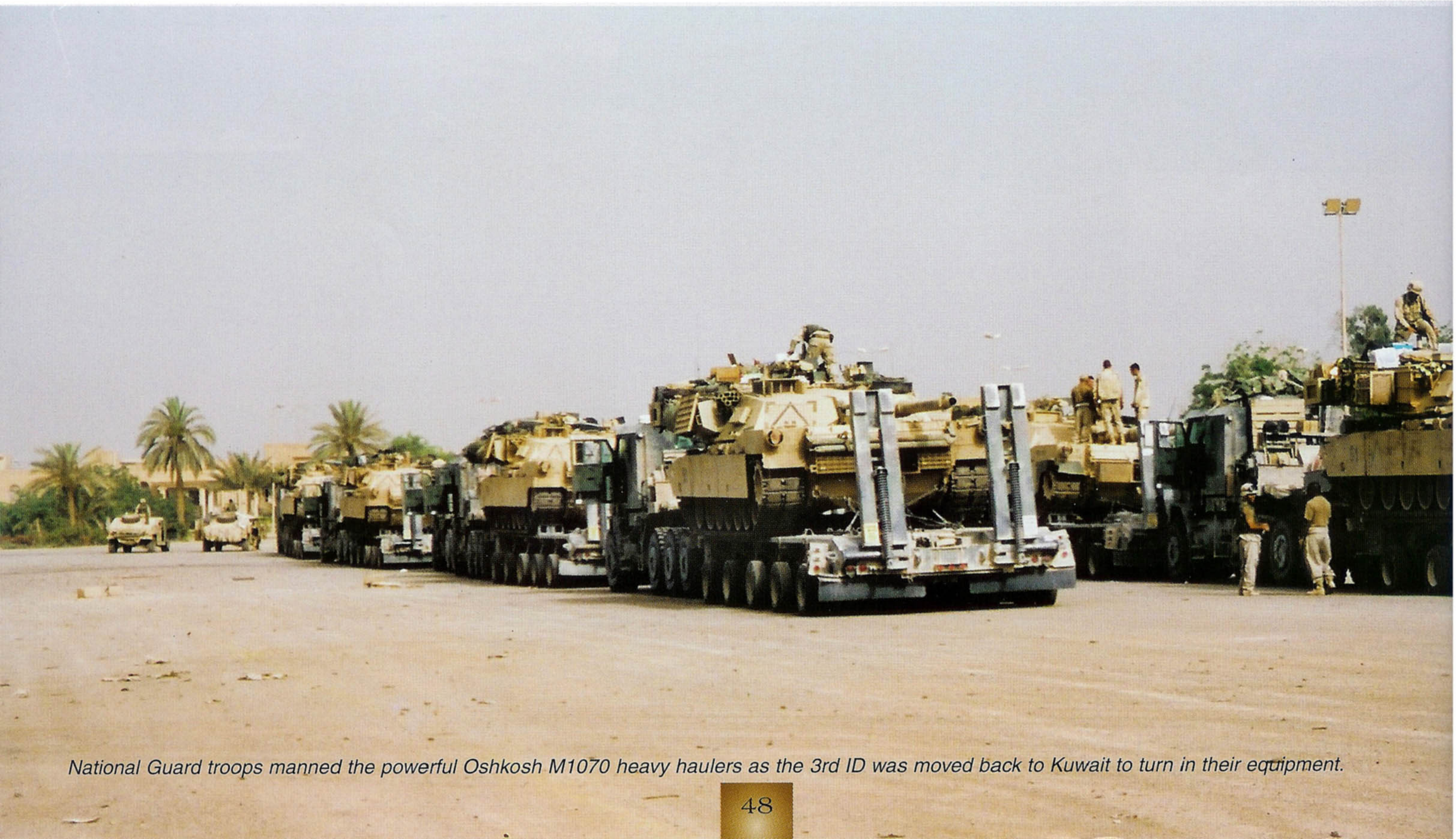
This soldier has borrowed an office chair as he guards an intersection in Baghdad along with the rest of his mortar track crewmates. Most M113 family tracks did not carry the sand shields, but did leave the front portion on since it had a footstep that made it easier to mount the vehicle from the outside.



"COMPLIMENTS OF THE USA" displays a less common way to carry the tow bars, attached to the front towing shackles. Most vehicles carried them on the rear. The downward pointing chevron and the blue band around the barrel indicate a 3rd Platoon vehicle. (Bush)



"COMBAT TESTED" is another tank form the 3rd Platoon. In this example a spare road wheel which seems to show serious signs of use is mounted on top of a sprocket gear. (Bush)



National Guard troops manned the powerful Oshkosh M1070 heavy haulers as the 3rd ID was moved back to Kuwait to turn in their equipment.

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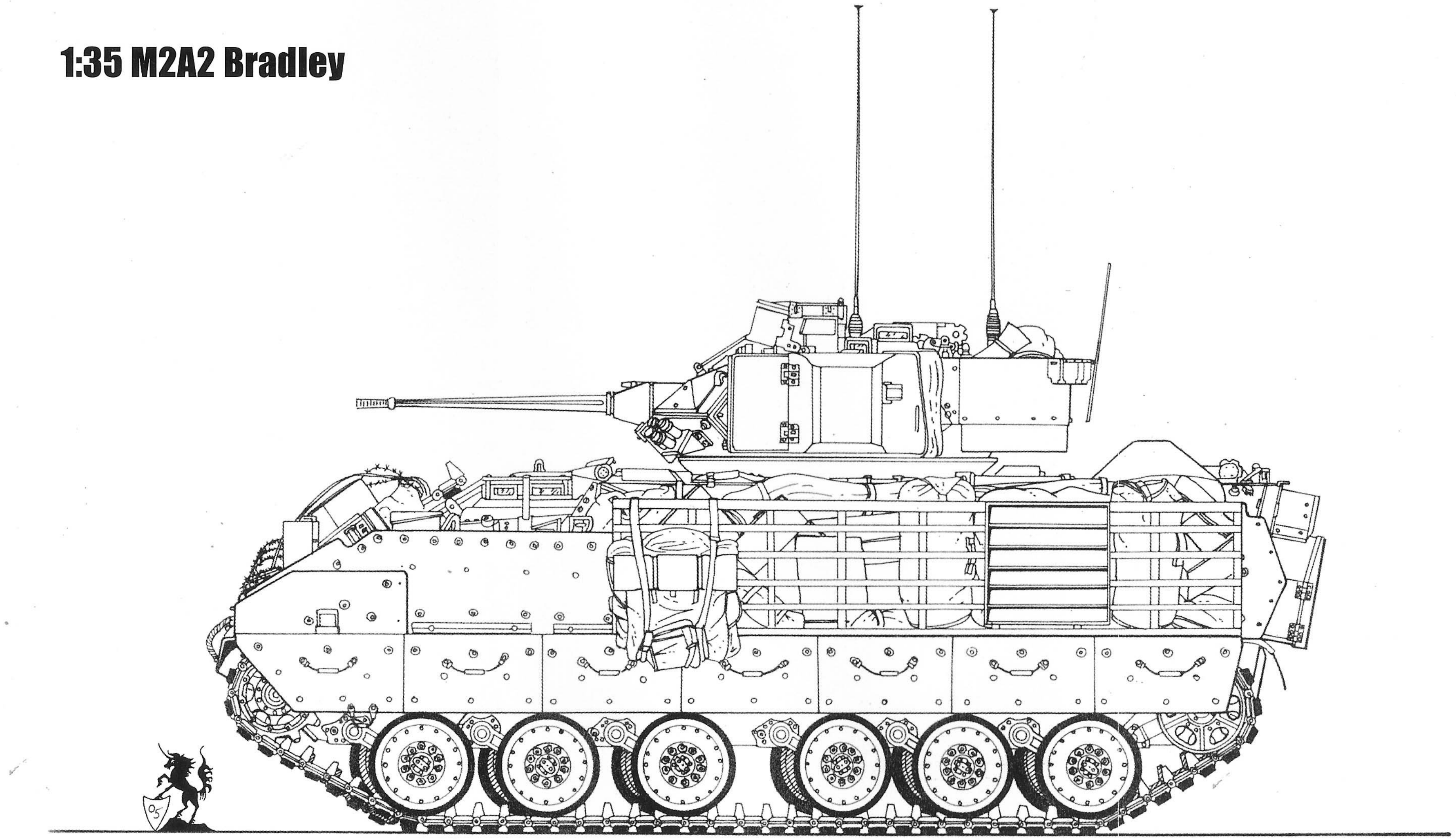
1:35 M2A2 Bradley



1:35 M1A1 Abrams